TRAVELLER®

MYSTERIES OF THE ANCIENTS

SCIENCE FICTION ADVENTURE IN THE FAR FUTURE

TRAVELLER

MYSTERIES OF THE ANCIENTS

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INTRODUCTION

Mysteries of the Ancients is a complete campaign for *Traveller* and in turn forms the first part of an even larger campaign! The subject is just as epic; the Travellers will unravel secrets of the mysterious being known as Yaskoydray, or Grandfather, and his descendants. Events in *Mysteries of the Ancients* will set up and foreshadow the *Secrets of the Ancients* and *Wrath of the Ancients* campaigns.

The Travellers will not initially realise they are about to come into contact with the Ancients but before long it will be apparent something very unusual is going on. They will gradually be led into the mystery of Twilight's Peak; a legendary place described in a truly execrable epic poem and there the Travellers will confront the Ancients themselves.

Little is known for sure about the Ancients and what is known is fragmentary. There are various theories about what species they were, or if they were an alliance of more than one species. Their capabilities were certainly enormous; they could destroy planets or move them into a more favourable orbit. It is widely, and correctly, suspected that some 'official' projects have discovered more about the Ancients than has been made public but the truth is that even the most learned Imperial scientists are still trying to put together a picture of who the Ancients were, where they came from and what happened to them.

REFEREE'S OVERVIEW

Mysteries of the Ancients is in three main parts. In the first, the Travellers seek out an old contact and are led into the world of the Ancients Hunters. Most are cranks and frauds but among them are those who know secrets… deep, frightening secrets.

The first part of the campaign ends with the Travellers leaving the world of Calefaction in the Caledonia system. The planet may or may not have been destroyed at this point. As the Travellers try to make sense of what has happened they discover clues leading them to the truth behind the legend of Twilight's Peak. The campaign then moves to its climax as the Travellers locate and enter an Ancients Base, activating its denizens and triggering a three-way conflict between themselves, a Droyne party and the Ancients themselves.

A PACKAGE FROM SORREL

The campaign begins with the arrival of a mysterious package sent by a contact who seems to be in trouble. Its contents are intriguing – a gun and possible Ancients artefacts. Analysis of the objects produces more questions than answers. If the Travellers want more information they need to find Sorrel Tergaii, their contact. Their only lead points to a crew of Ancients Hunters known to operate around Egypt in the Glisten subsector of the Spinward Marches.

ANCIENTS HUNTERS

Proceeding to Egypt, the Travellers search for Bernadatta Khaled and her crew, last known to be operating out of Egypt starport. Seeking information, they encounter the self-proclaimed Captain of Knowledge, who operates an Ancients museum. Clues at Egypt point to a small town on Callia, last known location of Bernadatta Khaled and her converted scout ship *Garnette*.

IN FLEETING MEMORIAM

At Makintown on Callia the Travellers find *Garnette* standing empty and bodies in the town. Something is killing the inhabitants, who are behaving very strangely. In fact they are being stalked by a deadly creature with unusual mental powers. The creature was brought aboard the scout ship in the hope of getting information from a genuine Ancients expert who lives nearby. The crew are dead and the Travellers must confront a creature they may not even be able to perceive.

Khaled's ship is currently operating under the name *Garnette*. The vessel has had other identities, however. One of them was the *Balevney*, whose story was told in the epic poem Twilight's Peak. The original copy of the tale is found aboard the ship. It is partially true but contains some blatant lies – one of them the name of the ship and the locations it visited.

HELL AT PERIHELION

The Travellers learn from the logs aboard *Garnette* that their contact, Sorrel, is on Calefaction, a world in the Caledonia system. Arriving there, they discover she is working at a hot-side experimental mining installation in an extremely hostile environment. They arrive just in time to rescue Sorrel from a disaster.

At the Fuller Experimental Mining Installation the Travellers discover carnage. Security robots have run amok, killing most of the staff. The others are in hiding. Investigating, the Travellers discover their friend Sorrel has been affected by the artefacts she discovered and has now embarked upon a crazed scheme to destroy the entire planet. Unknown to any of them, this is the work of the same creature encountered at Callia.

YUSOTE

During this phase of the campaign the Travellers encounter a group of Droyne loyal to a Leader who is interested in their travels. His name is Yusote and he has an agenda. At this point he lies about it, saying he is learning about Imperial culture to assist in diplomacy but the Travellers will eventually realise he is also seeking Twilight's Peak.

THE CONFERENCE OF AKI

The Travellers have attracted the attention of Omicron Division, an elite force operated by the Imperium 'outside the usual channels'. They are very well equipped and apparently permitted to take any and all measures necessary. Hoping to find out more about what the Travellers know, Omicron Division induces a would-be Ancients Hunter to hold a conference aboard a liner in the Aki system.

MERCEDES

The Travellers encounter the original owner of *Garnette*, a woman named Mercedes Karamaka. She has some answers for the Travellers, or at least a lead on some. The Travellers recognise from her handwriting that she is the author of the Twilight's Peak manuscript. The meeting is broken up by an attack mounted by mercenaries serving Omicron Division. Mercedes flees but not before revealing that Twilight's Peak is a functioning Ancients base located under a mountain in the twilight zone of the tidally locked world Lydia.

TWILIGHT'S PEAK

Under the mountain on Lydia is a dormant Ancients base, which is activated by objects the Travellers are carrying. Their ship is forced down into an automated docking area. The Travellers explore the base, searching for a way to release their ship. They encounter various hazards ranging from bio-engineering projects that are still ongoing to simple devices that they do not understand, and eventually figure out that they are not alone. In the base are Yusote and his followers. They are not forthcoming about how they got into the base, nor how they found it, but they warn the Travellers of grave danger and suggest cooperating to overcome it. This translates to using them as guinea pigs to try to figure out their ancestors' dangerous technology.

Eventually the Droyne party finds out what they need and gains control over most of the base's systems, and it becomes apparent that Yusote wants to awaken a large number of Droyne warriors who are in suspended animation in the base. These are Archaic Droyne, from the age of the Ancients. There are also a number of Ancients devices of various sorts that the modern Droyne want but as soon as the Archaic Droyne awaken they begin killing their more recent cousins. The Yusote proposes an alliance against their predecessors, suggesting that if they get loose in the modern universe they will cause all manner of destruction. Together the two groups might stop what they have set in motion.

With their modern-Droyne allies, the Travellers need to derail the Archaic Droyne plan to fully reactivate the base. They are up against Ancients weapons but the Archaics are still somewhat confused from their long sleep, leaderless and unwilling to face existence without meaning. Besides, it is their duty as guards to prevent anyone else gaining control of the base. They prepare to self-destruct the installation, forcing a race to get out before it is destroyed.

Long-time *Traveller* fans will recognise some of the events, names and places in this campaign. It pays homage to classic *Traveller* adventures including *Research Station Gamma* and *Twilight's Peak*. Indeed, *Mysteries of the Ancients* could be considered a greatly expanded and updated version of the original *Twilight's Peak*. There are significant differences however; the location of the adventure for one. This should not really surprise smart Travellers – after all, the starship in the original story was called *Blatant Lie*.

A NOTE ON THE ANCIENTS

This campaign features characters who have varying ideas about who and what the Ancients were. The Travellers may or may not already know the truth, and may be amused by the strange ideas the Ancients Hunter community has put forward. The referee need look no further than the Internet for inspiration and an impression of just what sort of nonsense some people will believe – Flat Earthers, conspiracy theorists of all kinds, climate change deniers and the more rabid adherents of certain political figures can all serve as inspiration for the Ancient Hunting community.

The subject of the Ancients is complex but for the purposes of this campaign the referee will find the following summary useful.

The Ancients were in fact Droyne but not all Droyne could be considered Ancients. It is possible that members of some other species had an important leadership role in Ancients society but their masters were a Droyne named Yaskoydray (Grandfather) and his offspring. They performed wonders but ultimately warred upon one another and destroyed themselves. The surviving servitor races, including Droyne, regressed before eventually re-emerging onto the interstellar stage. It is widely assumed the Ancients are all 'gone' in some manner but this is not the case. At least some are still in existence.

None of this is common knowledge and ideally the Travellers will not learn the whole truth until the revelations within *Secrets of the Ancients*. Even then, what is presented as or appears to be the truth might not be what it seems. By the end of this three-campaign series the Travellers will know more than they want to about the Ancients and Charted Space might never be the same again.

RUNNING THE CAMPAIGN

The Travellers need a reason to get involved and to be on or near Egypt/Glisten in the first place. The campaign opening provides one but as always the Referee can adjust this to suit their needs. Ideally, a formulaic 'go here, do this, receive X Credits' approach should be avoided in favour of in-game reasons such as repaying a favour from a friend or seeking information the Travellers are interested in. Once the Travellers begin to realise they are onto something connected with the Ancients they may become self-motivated. Whether the specific motivator is curiosity, a desire for power or an intention to sell artefacts for as much as possible, the Ancients are a powerful lure.

As always, it is not possible for the creator of an adventure or campaign to predict what capabilities the Travellers might have. The assumption in this volume is that the Travellers are talented people rather than superheroes and that their equipment is typical of a free trader crew rather than an armoured division. Travellers with enormous psionic powers or who are equipped in prototype TL16 battle dress may find some elements of the adventure a little easy. The Referee can adjust the level of opposition to suit the Travellers' capabilities if this seems desirable.

INVOLVING THE TRAVELLERS

The campaign begins when the Travellers receive a package from a contact named Sorrel Tergaii. This incident can occur anywhere but it would be helpful if the Travellers were within striking distance of Egypt in the Glisten subsector when it does.

REFEREEING THE CAMPAIGN

Much of the campaign is open, with the Travellers free to do as they please. The worlds where adventures are set are all within six parsecs of Glisten and can be reached by a jump-2 ship but there are plenty of other places the Travellers could go along the way. There is nothing wrong with this; indeed, it gives the Travellers an opportunity to experience different worlds and cultures, and maybe have some adventures there. However, there is always a danger the Travellers may lose the plot, so to speak, and forget what they are doing. If they have forgotten about a vital clue the Referee may have to remind them. Opportunities for this are built into the adventures along the way.

Some Traveller groups are highly proactive and will seek out sources of information everywhere they go, chasing down rumours when the opportunity arises. Others need a clear path to follow from one objective to the next. This campaign assumes the Travellers want to know about the mysterious jewel they were sent and/or what happened to their friend, and will actively search for information. A less motivated group might not realise adventure hooks are being dangled in front of them and might need a push. However, it is always best if the Travellers succeed by their own efforts rather than simply following the arrows.

The main elements of the campaign must happen in order. Sorrell's location is discovered aboard the scout/courier *Garnette*, which necessitates the trip to Callia. This leads to Caledonia. Additional clues will finally lead the Travellers to Twilight's Peak. However, interludes and side trips can be inserted at the Referee's discretion. Some events are necessary to the advancement of the plot but might not happen in the sequence presented here. For example, meeting Mercedes will fill in some of the blanks and lead the Travellers onward towards their goal, so it is necessary this happens before the campaign moves to its finale. However, the meeting might take place later in the campaign than the order of adventures seems to indicate. The Referee should implement events wherever they make sense rather than slavishly sticking to a script that may not be appropriate.

Some incidents are not absolutely necessary to completing this campaign but lay the groundwork for what follows. In particular the Travellers need to become familiar with Vlen and encounter Omicron Division for the *Secrets* and *Wrath* campaigns. Early encounters with Yusote and his Droyne followers are not necessary to the advancement of the plot but will foreshadow the events of the campaign finale. In short, some elements of the campaign are fluid and can be tailored to the Referee's needs but there is a logical sequence of events that needs to happen before the finale can take place.

THE LEGEND OF TWILIGHT'S PEAK

Years ago, a badly-written novel in the form of an epic poem surfaced briefly and then (justly) vanished without trace among the thousands of terrible self-published books proffered for download on the Datanets every day. Named *Twilight's Peak*, it contained the far-fetched tale of an ambushed convoy, shipwreck and the struggle of the crew to survive a terrible winter in a strange octagon-shaped building.

The story is true.

More accurately, it is a poorly-executed dramatisation of a series of events that took place during the Third Frontier War. Locations were altered, names changed and the ending was completely made up. Yet there are truths within the text; a shipment really was ambushed and the crew did find shelter in a strange octagonal building. There, they were able to enter a mysterious base where they observed wonders.

The book is a truly terrible read. It is written as an epic poem and of quite incredible length. The author thought they were above such things as conventional rhyme, instead writing in 'thought rhyme' whereby the thoughts behind the sentences are in accord but the words most commonly are not. The result can be jarring, breaking whatever rhythm the reader has managed to attain. The author also makes use of rather weird kennings – an old term for representative words and phrases. Some kennings are cringe-inducing but clear; 'the blazing spear of malice' is a ship-launched missile. Others are convoluted or multi-layered to the point they make no sense. 'He was the nemesis of Credits' seems to imply a generous nature, whilst 'they gazed upon the star-nothing but could not see its start or end' is one of many totally incomprehensible phrases littering the text like discarded mind-raisins. Whatever *those* may be.

Fortunately for anyone who wanted to actually read this monstrosity, most personal comms come with a synopsis application which will take any text and distil it down to its basic meanings. In the case of Twilight's Peak this is rather disappointing – the standard setting produces a short and simple, but not very useful, summary of the work:

We All Died.

If someone really wanted to find information within this edifice of literary pretension, they could wade through the whole lot and try to manually convert it into something meaningful. Alternatively, with a great deal of effort and some creativity regarding the synopsis program's options menu, it is possible to extract a semi-coherent account from the text. It is a sad story, presented as truth, telling the tale of the *Gyro Cadiz* task force during the Third Frontier War. This force left Vanejen on 101–984 and was posted missing on 326–984.

According to the story, *Gyro Cadiz* was a chartered merchant ship carrying a shipment of anti-radiation pharmaceuticals. With the navy busy with the war, auxiliaries were in use for many purposes, including light escort duty. The *Carlisle*, *Black Gold* and *Blatant Lie*, all privately owned and on the wartime auxiliary list, were assigned. With only three scout/couriers available for escort, the insignificance of the task force was considered its best defence. However, the mission had been infiltrated. An unknown party wanted to hijack the valuable cargo and was not concerned who died in the process.

The task force performed ocean refuelling on several occasions and at some point a solar flare caused the *Gyro Cadiz* to crash. Elsewhere in the account it is stated that the merchant ship was sabotaged. Either way, *Black Gold* opened fire on her fellow escorts and crippled both, but was herself shot down with missiles laboriously dragged up to the top of a ridge. The survivors learned the truth from a mortally wounded member of *Black Gold's* crew.

It eventually proved possible to put together enough parts of the four ships that one might be able to go for help. In the interim the survivors struggled through a bitter winter in a strange octagon-shaped building, eventually discovering an installation built with extremely advanced technology underneath it. This enabled the crew to survive the winter but when they ventured outside again the installation's impenetrable doors shut them out.

Blatant Lie was repaired sufficiently to jump and an attempt was made to reach an inhabited system. Unfortunately the scout emerged in the middle of a battle between Imperial and Zhodani forces. It was hit by a stray missile and once more disabled. Unable to call for help, the crew watched the combatants move off and died a slow death when their ship's systems failed.

The legend further claims that the scout ship *Blatant Lie* was discovered in the Treece system a century later, drifting in a cometary orbit. Marketing for the novel-poem *Twilight's Peak* claims that the manuscript was found aboard the wreck, having been hand-written by the ship's second-in-command. The few copies that ever sold are attributed to this individual; one Wen Livern. Other than their position on the vessel and a claim they were a member of the Scout Service, nothing whatsoever is known about this person.

PUBLICATION AND FOLLOWING

The 'hand-written manuscript' was converted into a more conventional book and published in 1086. The wider universe rightly ignored *Twilight's Peak* but there were a few who took interest. A rumour went around the crankier ends of the generally crank-laden Ancients Hunter communities that the book contained information on a functioning Ancients base, and could be decoded by those that knew how. Various analyses were published and circulated, and every now and then a would-be leading light among the Ancients Hunter communities will announce they have unlocked the secrets hidden in the text. There are arguments raging by way of the x-boat network that started nearly 20 years ago, with no sign of agreement.

However, there are some problems with the idea *Twilight's Peak* is some kind of map to an Ancients site. There is no record of any ships having the names given in the text, no task force was sent out on that mission and no wreck was ever discovered. Wen Livern apparently never existed; at least, nobody of that name was serving in the Scout Service in the Spinward Marches during the Third Frontier War. Most of those claiming they have uncovered secret knowledge are notorious for this sort of thing; every few weeks one of them will announce an Imperium-wide conspiracy or tell a story about how great they are that contains plot holes a 12-year-old could see. The chances of *Twilight's Peak* being anything other than a work of fiction supported by a questionable marketing idea are slim at best. And yet…

THE REALITY

Twilight's Peak ends with the destruction of the *Blatant Lie*. That is to say, *it ends with a blatant lie.* Twilight's Peak – the place – does exist and finding it requires the destruction of a blatant lie – the claim that the *Blatant Lie* was destroyed and her crew were all killed. In fact, the ship had a different name and it was nowhere near Treece or Vanejen. It was not carrying pharmaceuticals.

Immediately before the war, the Imperial Interstellar Scout Service was conducting intelligence-gathering operations in District 268. This was nothing unusual in and of itself but significant resources had been put into a forward 'intel hub' on a remote moon in the Noctocol system. Data was routinely sent back every few weeks and the modified scout/courier *Balevney* was one of the vessels assigned to make the run.

The voyage was supposed to be simple. Posing as an ordinary scout/courier, *Balevney* would make her way to Glisten and deliver a cargo of raw intelligence data. Perhaps a pattern might be discerned in the movements of Zhodani raiders; perhaps there might be warning signs of Sword Worlder intentions. Whatever might have been, the mission came to a crashing end in the Lydia system.

Balevney was intercepted by a pair of raiders, at least one crewed by Vargr mercenaries fighting for the Zhodani. She stood little chance but was able to dive close to the surface of Lydia to buy time. Eventually she was hit and crash-landed in the world's twilight zone, near its largest mountain. With their comms disabled the crew were unable to contact what they presumed was a naval patrol which had fortuitously arrived in time. In fact, the raiders were taken out by a quite different mechanism. For this reason there are no naval records of this incident. Whatever attacked the raiders completely destroyed one and caused the other catastrophic damage. Unknown to the crew of *Balevney*, some of the Vargr mercenaries from the crippled raider made it to the surface.

The crew of *Balevney* knew they had limited time before air and supplies ran out. With no better options they explored a strange sensor reading and found their way into the mountain through a deep fissure. This led to a cavern which contained huge doors of unknown material. With excellent timing these swung open just as the Vargr mercenaries found their way into the cavern. The crew fled inside and were pursued.

Inside the doors lay wonders and death-traps, although the latter were unintentional. With no clue about the function of the machines they found, the crew had accidents but used their new-found knowledge against the pursuers. Eventually they had sole possession of the place and were able to remove a few artefacts. Most were incomprehensible but the crew found personal life-support units that enabled them to reach the wreck of the Vargr ship. Not much was left but it was enough to jury-rig *Balevney.*

Balevney belonged to the Scout Service but was soon put up for disposal as uneconomical to repair. Those who had found Twilight's Peak took detached duty as soon as they could. Some artefacts were sold on the grey market, setting the survivors up for life. Yet not all of them could settle down. The lure of the mysterious mountain remained. One survivor outfitted a huge exploration ship and went to search for other Ancients sites. Another became obsessed with seeking knowledge in obscure books. The other just vanished from history.

Much later, one of the crew wrote an account of the adventure at Twilight's Peak. The tale grew in the telling, as the saying goes, and eventually it became the work of fiction known – little-known, that is – today. Years passed and the people involved disappeared but the *Balevney* remained in service. Much refitted and repaired, she has another name now. The artefacts were scattered and the mountain remained undiscovered. Until now.

FATE OF THE SURVIVORS

Baleveny had seven personnel aboard at the time of the incident. Five of these were members of the Scout Service, forming an oversized crew. The mission commander and pilot/astrogator crewed the bridge, with an engineer and technician working drives and systems. A gunner was carried, who filled in other duties when not needed. In addition an officer from Naval Intelligence was aboard with a single marine assigned as escort.

Three of the crew survived the ambush and subsequent adventure at Twilight's Peak. All three took detached duty from the Scout Service immediately afterward, citing a need to recover from their traumatic experience. They did not include the Ancients base under Twilight's Peak in their report and in the last days of the Third Frontier War there was little incentive to investigate their story. They went their separate ways after selling artefacts from the base on the underground market. All three obtained new identities in some manner. Their service records end at the point they went on detached duty.

Scouts officially never leave the service and can be recalled at any time. In practice, most of those who do not return to the active list within 18 months or so never come back and there is an unofficial 'do not reactivate' list for those who are too old or damaged – or who have become suspect in some manner – to be effective. Some Scouts 'go detached' more than once in their careers, perhaps to pursue education or help with a family matter. Others need time to deal with something and are generally granted detached status. It is considered better to detach a scout now with the possibility of them coming back than to keep them in service until they have a breakdown and are lost for good. The service may have assumed the three just needed time after the deaths of their comrades.

If the Travellers investigate the *Baleveny*, they will find the names of the three survivors.

Banni Seliar was the mission commander. An experienced Scout, she had led expeditions on various worlds and openly considered the *Baleveny* assignment beneath her. Banni's protest is still on record, although there is no suggestion she under-performed on the data runs.

Banni Seliar re-emerged as Lyn Maddox, known to popular history as 'Mad Captain Maddox', after a change of appearance. Exactly where Maddox got the money to buy the wreck of an Imperial Navy strike carrier and outfit it as an exploration/research ship is open to speculation but she is known to have launched private expeditions on several worlds beyond the Imperial border. Her vessel, named *Rustic Idyll,* was last sighted in 1019 headed to spinward-rimward after resupplying at Bendor. Its fate remains unknown.

Lipar Ina Lea was the scout's gunner/general deckhand. He was a promising young recruit with a keen interest in Imperial history – and a degree in the subject from the University of Vincennes. His file notes that he is the most likely of the three to return to service but never did.

Lipar Ina Lea re-emerged as Jon Leask. He returned to his home in the Deneb sector and devoted his life to collecting historical knowledge. Awarded two doctorates in his lifetime, Dr Leask is a moderately well-known historian who died in 1065. His work is quoted by other historians even today. What is less well known is that Dr Leask also accumulated a vast body of work on the Ancients and other phenomena. Publishing under the title ‘Professor A’ he compiled some of the most scholarly analyses of the data available at the time.

Professor A’s work is hard to obtain as it was largely suppressed in the 1080s for unknown reasons. His writings include accurate representations of certain Ancients sites which have highly restricted access, and touches on other subjects besides. At times he veers off into doom-laden prophecy about a ‘threat of biological origin’ capable of consuming all life on a planet. Mostly, however, he attempts to pull together the few non-contradictory statements to be found in the writings of other Ancients experts.

Mercedes Karamaka simply… vanished. There is no record of her after signing her detached duty papers. Her new identity never attracted attention and anyone investigating might conclude that perhaps she was happy to just fall off the radar. That, however, is not what happened.

Mercedes Karamaka proceeded through a series of new identities, pursuing whatever she felt like at the time. Her adventures took her far and wide, and somewhere along the way she arranged for a supply of anagathic drugs. Where Lipar plunged into academic research and Banni became a mission commander – both remaining true to their original nature – Mercedes was a chameleon, at times an academic, at times an adventurer. She was a starport broker for a while, then an agent for a mining firm. Where the others set out to find the Ancients the only way they knew how, Mercedes decided to go everywhere and try everything.

Along the way, Mercedes began to write. Penned for her own amusement at first, the tale of her adventure became important to her. She would memorialise her companions, she decided, a century after their deaths. Details were changed, a new ending was added and eventually the work was brought to market. Under the pretence of a ‘found manuscript’, Mercedes Karamaka published the tale of her comrades and their fight for survival. She took many liberties with the truth but never said anything bad about her comrades that was not deserved. In that, the account is truthful. It does, of course, end with a blatant lie – the crew of *Baleveny* did not all die.

Mercedes Karamaka is still alive.

As for *Baleveny*, it was in a sorry state. The barely-flyable remains were sold to a private buyer who also took several other ships. It is possible that some of those were refurbished and became part of the complement of Captain Maddox’ vessel. *Baleveny* was renamed when her repairs were completed and for a long while she was operated by the current identity of Mercedes Karamaka. During her ‘static’ periods Mercedes initially kept the ship in flying condition but eventually decided to dissociate herself as the vessel could be used to link her current identity back to the original.

Garnette was passed to a friend rather than being sold on the open market. She had become something of a status symbol in the more active end of the Ancients Hunter community and could have been sold for far more than her value as a starship, but instead *Garnette* became the personal transportation for a well-funded individual named Bernadatta Khaled. Khaled is widely known among Ancients Hunters, most of whom consider her to be something of a legend. It is generally considered fitting that Bernadatta should possess *Garnette*. Most serious Ancients Hunters cannot imagine anyone else worthy of the honour… except perhaps themselves.

SUBSEQUENT EVENTS

Bernadatta Khaled was not a pilot, nor an engineer. She recruited a crew and kept swapping personnel until she found two individuals she could work with and trust. Bernadatta told them where she wanted to go and they ran the ship. In return they received a good salary and the chance to participate in her adventures. They saw wonders and sometimes teamed up with other individuals or even whole crews.

Among those Bernadatta worked with was Sorrel Tergaii. This was a matter of paths crossing repeatedly whilst chasing the same or different goals. Whilst Bernadatta typically only worked with any given Ancients Hunter once, Sorrel was a kindred spirit whose goals and viewpoint were just different enough to provide a useful alternate perspective. Bernadatta freed up a cabin for Sorrel on a semi-permanent basis, until eventually they reached a decision point.

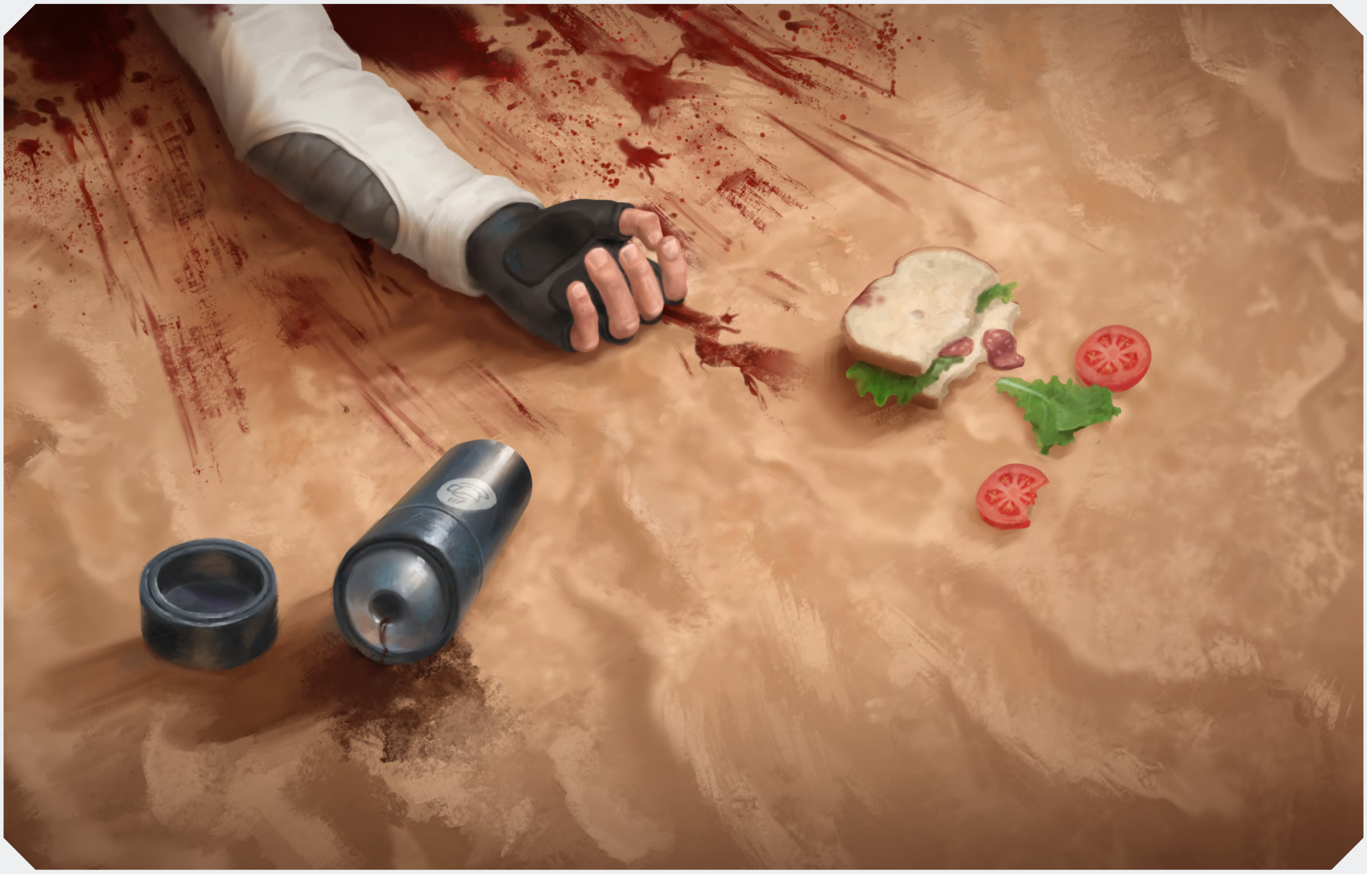
Investigating some truly weird rumours, the crew of *Garnette* discovered that something was going on at the Fuller Experimental Mining Installation on Calefaction. Sorrel parted company with the crew – they thought it would be temporary – and inveigled her way into the installation. Meanwhile *Garnette* chased down tales about something called Omicron Division and eventually managed to appropriate a specimen one of its contacts had obtained.

Bernadatta caught up with the specimen at Callia, at a remote temporary landing site. She could not know it but Omicron Division had taken possession of the specimen, which was to be shipped out to Research Station Gamma, many parsecs away, that very day. Unfortunately, it was too late for the personnel guarding it. When Bernadatta arrived some kind of creature was wandering around outside the landing site, with people apparently searching for it. Bernadatta saw a robot react to the creature whilst its handlers were oblivious. The handlers turned to look at what the robot was indicating but apparently lost interest as soon as they saw it. The creature pounced, tearing one of the handlers apart whilst the other unwrapped his lunch and sat down to eat. He died bloodily halfway through a sandwich.

Although Bernadatta – and apparently the Omicron Division robots – could see the creature plainly it was as if the human personnel could not even acknowledge its existence. Guessing that this was some kind of psionic invisibility, Bernadatta retreated and geared up her team with psionic shielding equipment. They made themselves some tranq guns, guessed at dosages and compositions, and set out to hunt this most dangerous prey.

Bernadatta and her crewmates caught up with the creature after a long hunt, finally bringing it down and loading it into an adapted livestock low berth. Hoping to learn more about this deadly creature they brought it to a remote town on Callia where an old friend lived. This was the Ancients Hunter known as Blanca on the datanets, retired now and hiding from wannabees as much as anything else. Bernadatta went to see Blanca and in her absence the creature got out.

As to Omicron Division, the pickup ship arrived hours after Bernadatta left. They assumed the creature was loose on Aster and wasted days looking for it. By the time Omicron Division was sure there was no creature on Aster, Bernadatta was well on her way to Callia and the Travellers were about to receive a package from Sorrel.



WHO AND WHAT WERE THE ANCIENTS?

There are many theories among the people of Charted Space about who the Ancients actually were. It is possible to say that 'well, they were the Ancients' and for this statement to be both correct and infuriatingly meaningless. The fact is that the Ancients *were* the Ancients. Even if whatever species or group of species they were remains extant today, those people are not the Ancients. Thus the question is too vague to be meaningful. It is possible to define more useful questions and to obtain answers. However, the Referee should remember that the vast majority of people in Charted Space have no idea who or what the Ancients were. Rather strange theories have been propounded, often for self-serving reasons such as claiming a particular group is the rightful owner of everything the Ancients might have touched.

The reality is that the Ancients were not a species so much as a cultural phenomenon. It arose among the Droyne somewhere between 300,000 and 350,000 years ago with the emergence of an individual now known as Yaskoydray or 'Grandfather'. Yaskoydray was a mutant, a super-genius whose abilities far surpassed those of even the most capable ordinary Droyne. At that time the Droyne had developed a TL10 society, although the jump drive had not yet been invented.

Yaskoydray solved the problem of his own mortality and produced 20 children. Each of these had 20 of their own, creating a super-intelligent elite to run Droyne society. Arguably, these 401 individuals were the Ancients and everyone else served them. No Droyne community, nor any of the other species recruited to serve Yaskoydray and his children, could really comprehend the wondrous science and technology they developed.

Among these wonders was the jump drive. Using it, Yaskoydray sent his descendants out to explore the universe, each supported by groups of ordinary Droyne. The children and grandchildren had different fields of interest and conducted experiments according to their nature. Some of these were biological, uplifting primitive species to create servitors for the Ancients. Others were subtle, creating new materials or advancing Yaskoydray's understanding of the universe a little more. Some projects were grandiose, such as moving entire planets to create a rosette of habitable worlds or modifying others to make them more suitable for colonisation.

The Ancients spread out across the galaxy, voyaging far from what is now Charted Space. They attained a level of technology almost unimaginable to modern people. It is widely thought that their population was low, although this may have been because major population centres were destroyed. The small-population theory regarding the Ancients is supported by an apparent quest to find or create suitable workers. Humans from Earth were promising and were seeded on many worlds, sometimes with genetic modification, to create assistants for the Droyne-Ancients. Another Terran species, the wolf, was also selected for this role and uplifted to sentience. Populations of what would later be known as Vargr were seeded to coreward of human-settled worlds.

It is arguable that the Ancients culture was an overlay upon that of the Droyne, and that most Droyne were not really Ancients – they just worked for them like humans and other species did. Whatever the truth of this, the Droyne were spread to many worlds. Sometimes this was deliberate, with a specific project in mind, but it may be that some Droyne simply settled where they wanted. Yaskoydray and his offspring were busy with their projects; the activities of ordinary Droyne may have been beneath their notice. These scattered Droyne had Ancients technology but their status as 'Ancients' is debatable.

Eventually, Yaskoydray had fulfilled all the ambitions his mighty intellect could conceive. He spent time touring the galaxy, admiring his own works and those of his offspring. Eventually, he found a new goal, something so important to him that he called all his offspring to help. It is not known what this goal was but only some of his offspring responded to the call. Whether others were too busy or they actively opposed Grandfather's new plan, they omitted or outright refused to muster to take part in it.

Yaskoydray embarked on his goal but encountered resistance. It may be that some offspring directly countered his efforts, or that their work got in the way of his own. Either way, Grandfather resolved to kill all his children and grandchildren, and began doing so. This ultimately escalated into the Final War that destroyed the Ancients' civilisation.

The war was long and complex, with many factions. Some Ancients sided with Grandfather either wholeheartedly or out of convenience. Others tried to remain neutral or fled rather than fight. Factions fought one another over control of resources they needed to defeat Yaskoydray. Ordinary Droyne and other species were used as disintegrator-fodder by all sides or survived as best they could.

The Final War lasted around 2,000 years. By the end of it, Grandfather was sure he had eliminated his offspring and crushed all other opposition. Suns had been detonated, planets turned into planetoid belts and even more destructive weapons unleashed. As the surviving Droyne and other species huddled in the darkness of a shattered galaxy, Grandfather disappeared. According to some legends he created a pocket universe for himself and his new robotic servants, although there are some who claim he was killed or left Charted Space.

The 'pocket universe' theory raises another question: If Yaskoydray had eliminated all opposition, why retreat from Charted Space? There are no good answers, lthough certain Ancients 'experts' claim Yaskoydray discovered something that frightened him so much he hid himself away. Others wonder if he is not working on his great project and will someday return to bring about a golden age of enlightenment – or maybe exterminate everyone in Charted Space.

These questions remain unanswered but in the meantime the surviving Droyne were left leaderless and largely isolated from one another. Some worlds retained a high level of technology but could not maintain the installations and devices of the Ancients in the longer term. Others destroyed or hid them out of fear, especially since a characteristic of the later stages of the war was bombardment of any world with a significant Ancients installation. Some worlds were so damaged the population regressed to barbarism and it is possible that some Droyne groups actually did so by choice.

The surviving Droyne communities were largely isolated from one another and for the most part followed the same general pattern of gradual regression. Those that had not already been blasted back to the stone age lost their technology, with a few scattered exceptions. Droyne became extinct on many of their former worlds. Fossil records from this era indicate that most Droyne communities lost the ability to caste, becoming a generic proto-Droyne. How similar these creatures were to the original pre-Ancients proto-Droyne is a matter for conjecture, as is their level of intelligence. It may be that on some worlds at least the Droyne not only lost their technology but also their self-awareness.

The decline was different in various locations but overall it was deepest by around -75,000. By this time there were virtually no Droyne communities with the ability to caste and fewer still with technology above the stone age. By all known principles the Droyne should have become extinct. Instead, a remarkable recovery began on around 20 worlds. This was more or less simultaneous, as far as can be ascertained from archaeological sites and folklore, suggesting an outside influence.

On the 'recovery worlds' the Droyne suddenly regained the ability to caste. The key to this was a set of golden discs engraved with portentous symbols, known as coyns. The Droyne of the Ancients and pre-Ancients eras had not needed such artificial aids but their use in a mystical ceremony seems to unlock some kind of preconditioning to develop the characteristics of a caste. Perhaps the earlier Droyne had some other method triggered by social factors or a function of the Leader caste.

It is possible that one of the Droyne worlds developed the coyns and rapidly rediscovered space travel, spreading them to other worlds. This would establish the Droyne as a Major Race by the usual benchmark of having invented the jump drive rather than learning how to construct it from others. It has also been postulated that Ancients technology was pressed into use but this theory has few adherents. Most Droyne were terrified of anything to do with the Ancients, making this unlikely even if they were able to figure out how to use such advanced devices after so many years of barbarism.

Many Droyne Communities have legends that they were visited by a saviour figure, usually represented as Yaskoydray, who presented the coyns and taught the Droyne how to use them. The teacher/saviour is said to have visited multiple times on most worlds and whilst conventional wisdom indicates a resurgent Droyne civilisation many legends are specific in stating these actions were taken by Yaskoydray himself. There are also those who think this was a surviving son or grandson, perhaps trying to create his own Ancients Renaissance.

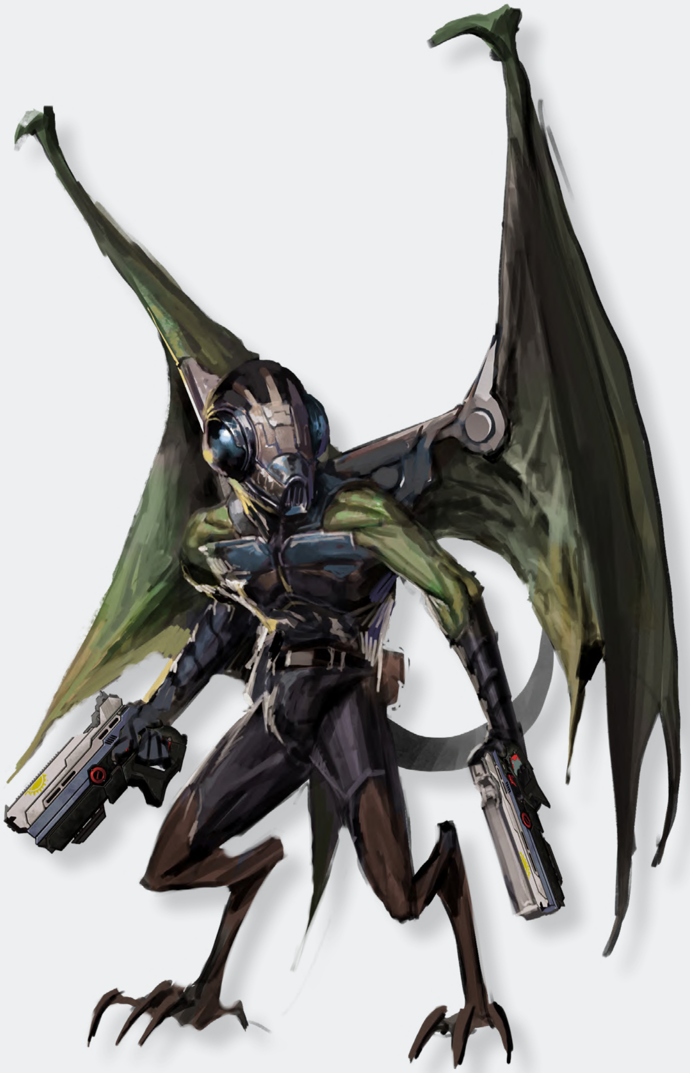
However the ‘recovery worlds’ gained the coyns, they were able to halt their regression and begin to grow again. Most underwent a rapid expansion and returned to starflight but not on a large scale. For unknown reasons, the Droyne worlds that recontacted one another had close cultural similarities despite many millennia apart, and shared a common language. This was (and is) Oynprith, spoken with virtually no differences on all Droyne worlds. Oynprith was not the only Droyne language but it was present everywhere.

The Droyne recovery or renaissance is dated to between -75,000 and -50,000, with different worlds developing on differing time frames. What they all have in common, however, is that all stagnated after a relatively short period of time. It is as if each world had a target level of technology which was reached quickly, after which the Droyne lost the will to progress further. They continued at their stable level of technology – whether stone tools, starships or something in between – for millennia more until contact was made with other starfaring races.

Today, Droyne are counted among the Major Races of Charted Space. They are confusing to outsiders, rarely explaining what they are doing or acting as expected. There are Droyne communities all across Charted Space and perhaps beyond. They vary widely, with some populations content to live a simple, pastoral life and others roaming the stars in advanced ships. There are cultural similarities between all groups and they share a common language that displays virtually no variation between communities separated by hundreds of parsecs and – in some cases – thousands of years. It is believed that at least some of these communities have had no contact with other Droyne for millennia, yet the linguistic and cultural drift that would be expected has not occurred. Ancients sites also include writings in Oynprith that can be read by a modern user of the language.

The original homeworld of the Droyne has never been discovered by humans and it is generally assumed that the Droyne themselves may not know where they originated. There are, however, many who believe the Droyne are keeping secrets and that the location of their homeworld is among them. This raises questions about what the Droyne might be planning or what they may fear, but as usual the Droyne themselves remain enigmatic.

If there is one feature of the Droyne that stands out above all else it is that they are mysterious. They do not offer an explanation of what they are doing and why, at least none that can be understood by outsiders. They engage in conduct that does not make sense from another species’ perspective, often carrying out actions that seem to have no benefit or which represent a needlessly convoluted way of going about a simple task. Some actions make no sense at all and appear to be completely random. Yet there must be a plan or purpose; no species creates an advanced starfaring society without rhyme or reason to their actions.



ANCIENTS HUNTING

Mysteries of the Ancients has certain core concepts, notably the existence of a large but fragmented Ancients Hunter community. The campaign will involve interactions with this community and the agents of the authorities who watch them.

THE ANCIENTS HUNTER COMMUNITY

The term 'Ancients Hunter' is applied loosely – and with everything from contempt to veneration – to those who dream of penetrating the mysteries of the Ancients. Most are wannabees who read obscure datanet sites and spout the latest nonsense theory in the hope of becoming interesting. There are those who take this to an extreme and have become minor personalities after being interviewed for crank documentaries. Some have made a considerable amount of money and may wield considerable influence over the more impressionable members of society.

The proportion of Ancients Hunters who actually do anything is rather low but there are those who make a real effort. For some, this is a matter of scouring the 'grey market' for artefacts on sale or first-hand accounts of those who have had encounters. Others will try to actually see Ancients sites for themselves. There are some that are publicly accessible, although they are heavily secured, and which can be visited like a museum. Of course, any artefacts will have been removed long ago.

To some people, finding a functioning Ancients site or useful artefact is a bit like a winning lottery ticket; they are more interested in making money or winning fame than figuring out any secrets contained within. Those with a genuine interest in the Ancients tend to go down one of two routes. Some work their way through a university course and use their qualifications to try to get into an official research programme. These tend to be selective and subject to constant scrutiny, due to the sensitive nature of the research. For those who cannot get into a programme or do not trust authorities sufficiently are forced to operate on their own.

In this context, there are multiple local Ancients Hunter communities as subsets of the larger one. Most 'serious' Ancients Hunters hold the wannabees in contempt. They might ask for assistance or information but do not believe they owe anything to people who are not willing to get out and put some work in. Useful contacts and respected peers are few and far between and in many cases one group will be at odds with others. Outsiders usually have to penetrate the outer layers of wannabees and fakes until they come across someone with real knowledge – or who thinks they have. Many of these people are secretive or will want something in return. Travellers searching for information on the Ancients may end up paying a lot of money or doing favours for someone whose knowledge turns out to be worthless or untrue. This is the world of the Ancients Hunter; those who truly believe it is worth it will pay the price.

STATUS IN THE COMMUNITY

Status within the Ancients Hunter community is a nebulous and subjective thing. A given 'expert' might be considered by some to be the 'real thing' yet be dismissed by others as a wannabee. This has as much to do with politics as belief – some 'experts' feel the need to bash others to increase their own status. In other cases an expert might be dismissed because they say things the observer would prefer were otherwise. However, overall there is a sort of hierarchy. The greater someone's status the more likely it is they will be taken seriously. This is not always a good thing. Some dealers masquerade as wannabees to avoid unwanted attention and reveal their true nature only to a select few.

There is no official promotion system or formal rank in the community. The 'ranks' in the Ancients Hunter Status table represent a general perception of status and how it might be achieved.

ARTEFACT TRADING

The term 'grey market' is generally applied to distribution of legitimate goods through 'alternate channels' but it has widened to include trade in Ancients artefacts. Indeed, to some any reference to the grey market means Ancients or unusual alien items. This is not entirely incorrect; the items may well be genuine but are being traded outside what authorities would consider 'proper channels'.

Ancients Hunter Status

Rank	Notes	Achieved
Wannabee (Noob)	Someone who dabbles in 'hunting' but does not really do anything or is not 'into it' to any real degree is termed a Wannabee or Noob.	This 'status' is usually awarded by others as an insult.
Wannabee (Esti)	Someone who has established themselves as a collector of lore and maybe has some decent information is known as an Esti (for established) but is still a wannabee to 'serious' hunters – who may themselves be of no greater status but would prefer to believe they are.	Estis are worth talking to at a convention or in a Datanet discussion. This status is recognition that the person has done some work and put time into learning Ancients' lore.
Wannabee (Deludo or Fanpy)	Deludos (deluded) or Fanpersons (Fanpy) are a special case of Estis who follow a false belief set or base their 'knowledge' on being a fan of certain experts rather than their own work.	This status is generally awarded to anyone the observer does not agree with and is rather subjective.
Wannabee (All)	All Noobs, Estis, Deludos and Fanpy are Wannabees to those who actually put some work in but among themselves would use the more specific term.	Calling anyone a Wannabee is considered insulting. Most Wannabees – of any specific type – consider themselves to be at least Players.
Player	An active Ancients Hunter or someone with a decent collection of lore or artefacts could fairly consider themselves a Player.	This status is often self-awarded – almost always wrongly. Recognition as a Player by others requires becoming noted for activity, whether that is active hunting or lore collection.
Hunter	A well-established hunter with good connections and a track record of solid information or a collection of artefacts.	'Real' hunters will be recognised by their peers, which is the only recognition they care about.
Expert	A very knowledgeable individual, who may have visited several sites or done significant research. That does not mean they are right, only that they are eminent.	Hunters effectively award this status by consulting and respecting the experts. This is informal but real.
Legend	The most famous Ancients Hunters are referred to as Legends.	Typically this is someone who is known to have made big discoveries or put forward widely accepted knowledge.

Trade in Ancients artefacts – as well as those of certain alien and human cultures – is strictly limited. Licenses must be obtained through the office of the subsector duke, with input from the Imperial bureaucracy and scientific bodies associated with the process. This is usually part of the subsector capital's main university and getting a contract to inspect artefacts is a lucrative business. Once a license is obtained, the trader is subject to audit at any time and will be randomly visited by university personnel. These are usually graduate students sent halfway across the subsector so that a professor does not have to do it, and they are not always very knowledgeable. This is a problem since the system works on the assumption that any item that cannot be positively identified as a low-level and harmless artefact must be analysed at a major installation.

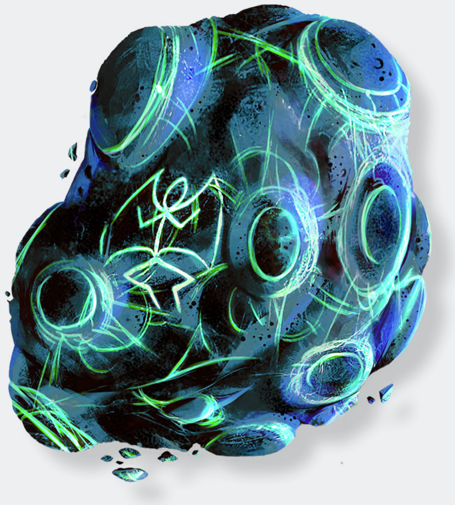
The system imposes delays and inconvenience on dealers, who are further beset by notification requirements and other bureaucratic hassles. There are many who insist that the whole licensing arrangement is designed to prevent trade in artefacts entirely. It is more likely that the system is designed to ensure any dangerous or important artefacts end up in the hands of the authorities. All dealers must sign up to a compulsory purchase system whereby the authorities can buy up anything the dealer is trading. Prices are typically generous, which again serves to keep important or useful items out of the hands of private citizens.

As a result, most traders only have curiosity items for sale, at least officially. There are ways around the system, such as mis-labelling Ancients items as cultural artefacts from some unrestricted society. Traders caught doing this are severely punished but still items are sold under the counter in this manner. In addition, 'grey' traders exist outside the licensing system. This is entirely illegal and, again, is severely punished. However, the profits to be made from trading illicit artefacts are enormous.

ACCESS TO EXPERTS AND ARTEFACT TRADERS

Getting access to an artefacts trader or an Ancients expert is difficult. The authorities have agents who have no other job but to expose grey traders, so they are unlikely to advertise their services. Unless the Travellers already know someone – perhaps one of their Contacts – they will have to chase rumours and ask the right questions without being taken for cops. This is not an easy task.

The process can be fully abstracted but this detracts from the experience of playing the game. Unless the Travellers are vigorously opposed to having to roleplay, the Referee should expect them to provide some sort of plan. Promising avenues include academics and traders in unusual items, who might know someone or themselves be interested in the Ancients. Serious academics may well be offended that anyone might think they were involved in fringe-crank stuff like Ancients hunting, however, so the Travellers will have to tread carefully.



It should never be possible to gain access to a source of reliable information or an artefact seller with one check. Instead the Travellers will have to work through a process. The first stage is to find a place to look; artefact traders are usually found either 'in plain sight' at well-trafficked locations or well off the beaten path where nobody would think to search. Some worlds simply do not have anyone to find.

Finding a place to look could be an exercise in guesswork, or the Travellers may put together some information they have picked up. At each new major location (a big city or a Class A or B starport) the Travellers may seek information. This requires an Average (8+) Streetwise check. If successful, the Travellers have gained some clues. The Referee should keep track of the value of information the Travellers have. Each successful check gives an amount of information equal to the Effect, recorded as a running total called Information Value (IV).

At any time they are in a suitable place, the Travellers may use up some of their IV. This permits a single Very Difficult (12+) Streetwise or Investigate check. If the location could plausibly have a trader or expert, that person is found if the check is successful. The amount of IV the Travellers spend is used as a DM on this check but any IV spent is gone and must be replaced by more investigation. Minimum spend is one point and no further attempts can be made at that location until the Travelers have increased their IV total – this represents getting more information which might lead to someone the Travellers had overlooked.

In the course of their search the Travellers come to the attention of the authorities. This might not amount to much; merely a note that someone was asking about the suspected artefacts dealer thought to be operating in the area. However, it could lead to an investigation and the arrest of the dealer or expert… or consequences for someone the Travellers did not know was involved. Lower-level responses are likely but careless Travellers could leave a legacy of arrests behind them which will make it difficult to contact dealers.

Who the Travellers find, and how useful they are, can vary. The Referee should secretly roll 2D on the Traders and Experts table to indicate the outcome. If the Travellers want, they can use more of their accumulated IV to influence this roll.

If the Travellers locate an expert they may gain additional information, represented by IV, which could lead them to someone else. They will also be able to ask questions of the expert. The Referee should note the level of knowledge the expert has and provide partial or wrong information accordingly. Remember that even the most knowledgeable experts know only a little of the truth; the Ancients are truly mysterious!

TRIGGERING A RESPONSE

The authorities do not want amateurs or anyone they cannot control poking around in something as sensitive and potentially dangerous as an Ancients site. This is a high-level – as in Security of the Imperium – matter. The fear is that artefacts could end up in the hands of people who do something destructive or stupid, essentially creating superpowered problems, or that the Imperium will lose the chance to make use of something powerful. However, at the same time, the Ancients are a rather obscure topic not taken seriously by most. In general this suits the authorities but it does mean that sometimes officials who could have warned about a suspicious situation discount it.

The result is a rather shadowy situation in which a small number of agents sincerely try to deal with the 'potential Ancients threat' and the vast majority have no idea what is going on. There are lists of suspicious activities but for the most part tracking the Ancients Hunters is concealed within other activities. This means that a Ministry of Justice agent might believe they are investigating someone as a typical smuggler without any idea what they are getting into. There are triggers for special reports, but an agent to whom the Ancients are just as fringe as ghosts or eternally preserved rock and roll stars from old Terra may not recognise the need to call in expert assistance.

At the same time, the majority of the Ancients Hunter community is harmless. There are similar communities of paranormal hunters, Elvis-the-Eternal fans and all manner of other obsessions. The real Ancients Hunters hide – intentionally or otherwise – among this harmless noise, making it unlikely they will be noticed so long as they keep a low profile.

Traders and Experts

2D+DMs	Expert	Trader
2–3	N/A	The lead was false. The Travellers come to the attention of local law enforcement.
4–7	The lead was poor. The Travellers make contact with a Wannabee – a fringe member of the community. They might be helpful in contacting someone more knowledgeable but most Wannabees have no real value other than as someone to impress.	The Travellers find a dubious artefacts trader but they have no genuine Ancients items. All they have is either genuinely misidentified or fake.
8–10	The lead was good. The Travellers encounter someone who has real knowledge – but not much. This may be an Esti or a low-end Player; it can be hard to tell at first. The Travellers can gain +1D IV from this person as well as getting some specific information, but part of it will be confused, missing or wrong.	The Travellers find a trader with little knowledge, who has some basic artefacts for sale and will buy from the Travellers. There is a possibility this individual does not know the real purpose or value of something they have.
11–12	The lead was good. The Travellers encounter someone genuinely knowledgeable – a Player. They can gain +2D IV from this person and get good answers to their questions.	The Travellers find a trader with good access to illegal artefacts and the knowledge to match.
13+	The Travellers have managed to find a real Expert. They gain +3D IV and will be able to obtain solid and detailed information which is as good as what anyone else knows.	The Travellers have managed to find one of the best dealers in the field.

DMs apply to this check:
If the Travellers are looking for an expert rather than a trader: DM+4
If the Travellers show they are in possession of real artefacts: DM+2

There is a threshold below which activities will simply not be reported and some individuals are on a ‘definitely harmless’ list. Getting on this list is not easy but someone who managed it could engage in highly suspicious activity before finally considered a potential problem. Overall, monitoring Ancients Hunters is done in much the same way as suspected criminals or political unreliables. Known individuals are tracked and those whose general location coincides with other people of interest will be more closely investigated. Ships that visit certain worlds within a short period of time of one another become interesting in the same manner. In addition, individuals and ships might be flagged for more clear-cut actions. Someone discovered actively seeking an Ancients artefact dealer might attract interest more quickly than someone who just happens to have visited the dealer’s home town.

The degree of interest the Travellers have provoked is tracked by a value known as Official Interest Indicator, or OII. OII is reduced by -1 every calendar month, to a minimum value determined by the Travellers’ Base OII. This starts at +0 but can vary depending on the Travellers’ actions. Base OII will be modified at times, usually increasing, and does not go down quickly. Once the Travellers are on the radar they will be tracked unless they find some way to reduce their Base OII.

Any time the Travellers engage in activity which might attract interest, OII is increased. At the end of each month, before reducing OII, the Referee should make a check to determine if the Travellers have provoked a response. This may take time to materialise, since information must reach a hub and be acted upon, but sooner or later someone will take an interest in the Travellers.

TRACKING OII AND BASE OII

Base OII is normally +0. It may be increased by the outcome of certain actions. In addition, the modifiers on the Base OII table are applied.

Eventually someone who has been inactive for a long time will fall off the radar. Base OII is reduced by -1 point per year. However, their name will be on the watch lists forever, so Base OII cannot go below +2 once it has reached that value.

Base OII is difficult to reduce by other means. An Imperial official could be induced to have elements of the Travellers' records suppressed or deleted, or might provide reliable-seeming information that places the Travellers above suspicion. Making this happen is beyond the scope of this campaign for the most part, although there is opportunity along the way. A Traveller who gains a new identity resets OII to +0 but this is worthless if they are still associated with other persons of interest.

OII can change more quickly. Actions that might attract interest include blatantly asking around about 'grey' Ancients artefacts dealers or making oddly specific datanet searches about sensitive topics. Most actions fall within the normal range of a person's activities, however, and will not attract attention. For example, the Museum of the Ancients at Egypt highport is a tourist attraction run by a known noisy-but-harmless wannabee. Visiting would not normally attract attention from the authorities. If the Travellers are discreet they can stay under the radar most of the time. Whenever they do something that might be noticed, the Referee should roll 2D on the Official Response table and add the Travellers' current OII to the total. This indicates the response, if any, made by the authorities.

INVESTIGATION AND INTERVENTION

If the Travellers trigger an investigation, they will become subject to a watch order. This means that their movements will be actively tracked and actions previously considered 'under the radar' now require a check to see if further escalation occurs. Whilst under investigation the Travellers' every action will be considered suspect. An agent will be assigned to investigate them and eventually speak with them directly. How this is accomplished depends on the circumstances. If the Travellers seem amenable, the agent might request a personal meeting. This request has no force of law and (legally at least) cannot be held against the Travellers if they decline. However, the agent is more likely to believe what they say if they talk voluntarily.

If an intervention is triggered, the Travellers will be arrested. If at all possible this will be planned in such a way as to minimise the Travellers' options and contain them. The authorities do not want violence but have no idea if the Travellers are dangerous terrorists, foreign agents or just a bunch of over-inquisitive adventurers. Ideally, they will be detained as they pass through starport customs or some other heavily secured area. Unless they resist the Travellers will find the authorities to be polite and professional but unyielding. If they do resist, they will be detained by force and any crimes committed whilst resisting arrest will be held against them.

Base OII

Event	Base OII
The Travellers are operating the *Garnette*	+4
The Travellers are known by Imperial officials to be in possession of unlicensed Ancients artefacts	+2
The Travellers have or are attempting to obtain a copy of Professor A's works	+1
At the end of *In Fleeting Memoriam,* if the Travellers are known to be connected to the events at Makintown	+1
At the end of *Project Gannessa,* if the Travellers are known to be connected with the events there	+2
At the end of *Hell at Perihelion,* if the Travellers are known to have been on Calefaction	+2
At the end of *Twilight's Peak*, if the Travellers are known to have been on Lydia	+4

Official Response

2D+OII	Result
2–9	The incident passed unnoticed. No OII change.
10–12	The incident was flagged as mildly suspicious. OII+1.
13–15	The incident was flagged as suspicious. A case officer is assigned or additional personnel added. OII +2.
16–18	An investigation is triggered. OII +3. This may lead to Omicron Division actively seeking the Travellers.
19–21	An investigation is triggered or expanded. OII +4.
22+	Immediate intervention.

There is a middle road. If the Travellers declined to meet with the agent they will be informed a few days later that they are persons of interest in a routine investigation. The Travellers are again invited to meet with the agent and discuss what information they can provide; if they do so, they can avoid arrest and censure. However, if they do not comply a warrant will be issued by the Ministry of Justice for their arrest. This means that – officially – starports are closed to the Travellers and an arrest will be attempted anywhere they go.

The latter is not quite true; only areas of Imperial jurisdiction with sufficient resources will make the attempt but that is most places the Travellers might choose to go. They should also recall that space is Imperial jurisdiction and the navy cooperates with the Ministry of Justice on such matters. In short, the Travellers' ship can be stopped in space by any naval vessel. Failure to surrender will necessitate a military response – marines and naval weaponry will be brought to bear.

If the Travellers choose to flee or resist arrest, that is their choice. The Referee should ensure the Travellers understand that they will only be arrested if they do not comply with the request for a meeting and that resisting an Imperial arrest warrant is a serious matter. The Travellers will be outlaws from that point. They should be able to avoid problems by sticking to Class D and E starports where there are insufficient resources to tackle a well-armed band of wanted individuals but going anywhere else means taking on the might of the Imperium.

OTHER OBSERVERS

Once the Travellers develop an OII, they will start to emerge as Players rather than Wannabees in the search for the Ancients. It is possible that real experts or dealers will be more willing to talk to the Travellers than before, as they seem to be worth it. Others may be scared into avoiding contact with them.

OMICRON DIVISION

There was a time when Omicron Division officially did not exist. However, rumours about it eventually became sufficiently prevalent that simply denying its existence was insufficient. Instead, records were inserted into x-boat communications logs, indicating that the subject began to be discussed sometime around 1017. The discussion has been traced back to a prolific 'Ancients Theorist' who went by the tag Insider261. Datacasts by this individual can still be located in long-term archives, typically waffling on about corporate plans to annex various star systems and take over all combat martial arts competitions Imperium-wide.

Omicron Division features prominently in these diatribes, which are for the most part patent nonsense. According to Insider261, Omicron Division is a secret Solomani organisation dedicated to undermining the Imperium by 'appropriation of cultural assets' such as old books, artworks and alien artefacts. There are no records of Inisder261's 'revelations' attracting any interest at the time, largely because the whole identity was invented long after the fact.

Today, it is common knowledge in the Ancients Hunter community that Insider261 was a Wannabee who made up a number of ridiculous theories. All have been shown to be baseless and are thoroughly discredited to the point where anyone who says they believe Omicron Division exists is essentially saying they are not a serious Ancients Hunter but a deluded noob. This represents one of the most successful intelligence coups of recent history, discrediting all evidence of the organisation among the only people likely to investigate.

In fact, Omicron Division does exist. It has had a rather convoluted history, beginning in the early 800s during the Psionics Suppressions. The earliest form of the organisation was as a subdivision of a supposedly private enterprise known as Project Reintegra. It was private in the sense that it was not an official Imperial agency but was set up and funded by the Imperial family and received support from their private wealth. Initially the venture was entirely connected with psionics, offering individuals with talents the chance to declare them and receive protection.

Project Reintegra had multiple goals and an element of 'see-what-happens' but was largely about defusing the backlash from the Psionics Suppression Campaigns. The Imperial authorities correctly predicted that large numbers of people would be disaffected as a result of the suppression. Most would grumble a bit but accept the new way of things, but there would be some, perhaps many, who chose or felt they were forced to go underground. A proportion of these would become hardcore dissidents, unlikely to be placated, but many would hanker for a return to a more normal life. Project Reintegra was designed to assist in this process, or perhaps to lure as many potential dissidents out of hiding as possible.

Under the auspices of the project, identified psions who had no record of criminality were given jobs working for the project on condition they did not use their powers or teach others. How effective this was is an open question but at least some psions chose a comfortable job and high standard of living over persecution, and it is likely that some tensions were defused. Many Imperial researchers into psionics and related subjects were recruited from those who joined the programme. In this, Project Reintegra was at least a modest success. It deflected potential revolutionaries and placated others. Lesser talented psions were guided into posts as research assistants, helping Imperial scientists develop a greater understanding of psionic powers.

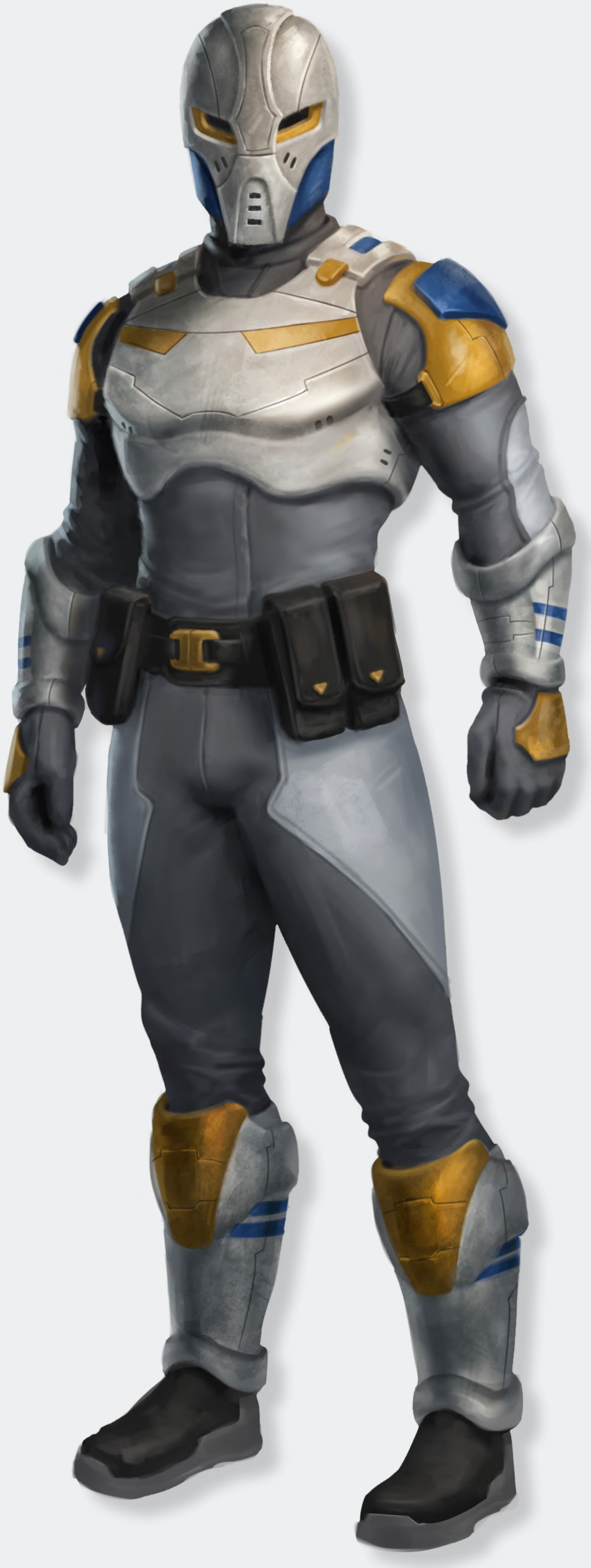
Omicron Division was one of several subdivisions within the project. It started out as a grouping of the more talented psions and more knowledgeable non-psions who chose to join the project. Those that could be trusted were sent out to seek others and bring them in or alert the authorities. More questionable individuals were kept in-house doing research or given tasks where their talents were useful. To this day, the Imperium maintains official psionics research projects. Many of these began or were augmented with Reintegra personnel, and over time the project morphed into something wider in scope.

The Psionics Suppressions were a success and as a result by 900 there were few psions to be reintegrated – but there were plenty of others still in hiding. Reintegra became a way 'back in' for psions and former dissidents of all kinds, typically outspoken academics and people who had been led astray by charismatic leaders. There were also minor criminals and possibly some major ones. In return for amnesty and generous rewards these talented-but-misguided people became available to the patrons of the project… the Imperial family.

Omicron Division also morphed, becoming an independent entity which was assigned personnel made available by Reintegra and others on secondment from the Imperial services. It is still ostensibly a private venture subcontracting to the Imperium in return for lavish funding, but in practice the organisation has become an elite investigative and troubleshooting force whose remit comes directly from the Iridium Throne.

Increasingly, Omicron Division has been concerned with matters connected to the Ancients. It has digits in other pies but for the past few decades the emphasis has been on determining the extent of the 'Ancients Threat' and preparing to deal with it. Omicron Division deploys a great many lone agents and small teams but its main assets are carried aboard a fleet of experimental warships. These are TL15 vessels incorporating early TL16 equipment developed in the Imperium, along with recovered Ancients devices.

Omicron Division actively searches for Ancients sites and information about the Ancients in general. It works through catspaws as much as possible, funding promising Hunters or instigating local Imperial officials to do the actual field work. For Omicron Division to show itself a situation must be very serious and if intervention occurs it will be fast and aggressive. The Division operates under a full Imperial Warrant, which essentially says that all Imperial officials must assist it to the fullest of their abilities and that any action deemed necessary by Omicron Division's commanders is sanctioned by the Imperium itself. This does not mean that personnel will not be held to account if they misbehave but if an Omicron commander deems it necessary to scrub all life on a planet, it will be done. If their report demonstrates the need was real they will be praised rather than sanctioned.



DROYNE AND THE ANCIENTS

The connection between the Droyne and the Ancients is important to this campaign, although the Travellers may remain entirely unaware of it until the events of *Secrets of the Ancients* begin to unfold. They will encounter a Droyne leader named Yusote and his followers, and may come to realise he has a similar goal to them. These characters are important to the finale and require an understanding of Droyne society, psionics and technology. Information necessary to the Referee is found in this chapter and Yusote's ship is detailed on page 158.

Droyne simply do not do anything the same way as other species. They solve the same problems in different ways – indeed, one community might use an entirely different method to the next village. Each community, known as an Oytrip, has its own characteristics. Tech Levels vary enormously and are often mixed. For example, a band of stone-age hunter-gatherer Droyne might have access to artefacts that grant them magical-seeming powers. Some Oytrips are so frightened of anything to do with the Ancients they will shun even useful objects, whilst others will use them if available. Certain Oytrips seem to be dedicated to recovering Ancients artefacts for use, destruction or to conceal them from others.

Similarly, objects made for Droyne are distinctly alien in appearance. They are obviously manufactured to be used by non-human hands but their whole aesthetic is quite different. Even if something could be made simply from a common set of materials, all but the most primitive Droyne societies tend to use exotic alloys and shapes that are distinctive rather than ergonomic. These items are not always better; indeed, some Droyne versions of human items made at the same Tech Level are inferior in function. It is generally assumed the Droyne do this for aesthetic reasons, although there are some who believe there are psychological or psionic reasons; many Droyne devices have a psionic component alongside their mundane ones.

TRAITS AND PSIONIC ABILITIES

All casted Droyne gain certain traits not available to non-Droyne. In addition, all casted Droyne have a mental shield against psionics even if they have no useable abilities and can also trigger most psionically activated devices. Some items are keyed to individuals or those with relevant abilities, however.

CLOSE COMBAT AVERSION

Droyne dislike close combat, possibly due to their light bone structure which makes blows more damaging. Despite possessing claws that could be effective, few Droyne learn to fight without weapons or other mechanical aids. A Droyne struck with a weapon that relies on impact, such as a baseball bat or club, suffers an additional point of damage per 1D rolled. In addition, all Droyne suffer DM-2 when fighting without weapons as their natural reaction is to flinch away rather than taking decisive action.

DROYNE CLAWS

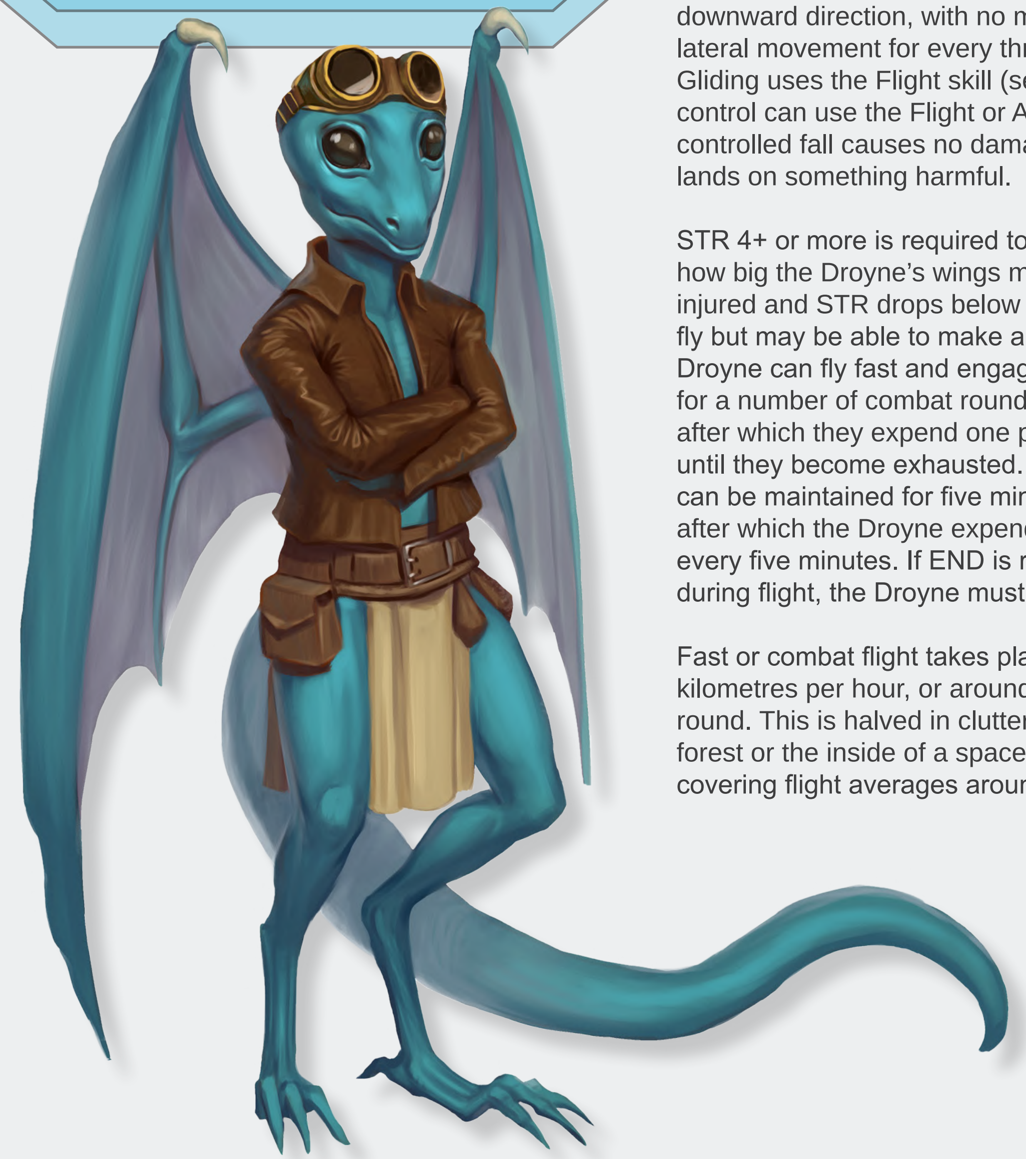
All Droyne have a sharp claw on their hands and feet, which can be used in combat if it is absolutely necessary, as a last resort. Claws do 1D+2 damage if employed as a weapon. They are more commonly used as a tool or an aid in gripping some surfaces. A Droyne that can dig their claws in gains DM+1 when trying to remain anchored or to keep hold of something.

WINGS

All Droyne have wings, although some are vestigial. Newly casted Droyne must determine wing size by rolling 1D. Wings are vestigial on a 1D roll of 1–3, small on 4–5 and large on 6. Droyne who have small or large wings automatically gain the Flight 0 skill.

DROYNE PSIONICS

Droyne do not have a SOC characteristic. Instead they have Sense (SEN), which is a measure of their psionic strength. Psionic powers are such an integral part of Droyne society that all Droyne are assessed in their youth and training begins as soon as abilities manifest themselves. Even Droyne without useable abilities are trained to operate in a psionics-rich environment. They know what to expect from those using powers and how to cooperate effectively with them. Some Droyne devices include psionic controls or require attunement to the mind of the operator. Droyne without useable abilities can still operate some of these items but most are assigned to those with relevant talents.



DROYNE FLIGHT

The wings grown by Droyne vary in their proportions. In many individuals they are vestigial and cannot support flight under any circumstances. Other Droyne have wings large enough to permit flight in some conditions and to act as a gliding aid in others. When determining the wing size for a given Droyne, roll 1D. On 1–3 the Droyne has vestigial wings. A Droyne with vestigial wings can still fly with the aid of a mechanical wing set.

A Droyne with large wings (or using a mechanical wing set) can fly on a world of Size 5 or less with a Standard atmosphere and on a world of Size 7 or less with a Dense atmosphere. Small wings allow flight on worlds one Size code smaller. It is possible to make a short glide or to slow a fall using wings on worlds two Size codes larger than one where flight would be possible and to do so on a world with a Thin atmosphere of Size 4 or less. A glide or controlled fall must be in a downward direction, with no more than two metres of lateral movement for every three metres downward. Gliding uses the Flight skill (see page 28). Falling under control can use the Flight or Athletics skill. A successful controlled fall causes no damage unless the Droyne lands on something harmful.

STR 4+ or more is required to be able to fly, no matter how big the Droyne's wings may be. If the Droyne is injured and STR drops below 4, they will be unable to fly but may be able to make an emergency landing. A Droyne can fly fast and engage in combat manoeuvres for a number of combat rounds equal to their END, after which they expend one point of END per round until they become exhausted. Distance-covering flight can be maintained for five minutes per point of END, after which the Droyne expends one point of END every five minutes. If END is reduced to 0 by damage during flight, the Droyne must immediately crash-land.

Fast or combat flight takes place at speeds of up to 30 kilometres per hour, or around 50 metres per combat round. This is halved in cluttered conditions such as a forest or the inside of a space station. Steady distance-covering flight averages around 10 kilometres per hour.

DROYNE SKILLS

Droyne have access to certain skills rarely or never found among other races. They are also highly unlikely to learn or use certain skills, which are termed Black Skills. These can be learned in certain unusual circumstances but a Droyne that knows them will always be on the fringe of the Oytrip's society. They are still part of the community but are 'not quite right' in some way. It is as if their spirit is tainted by the knowledge they carry. Any members of Yusote's following with these skills will be useful but kept at arm's length.

BLACK SKILLS

Black Skills include Carouse, Deception, Gambler, Persuade and Streetwise. All are connected with deceit or activity alien to the Oytrip-oriented lifestyle of the Droyne, such that learning these skills or engaging in these activities somehow diminishes the Droyne doing so.

ANCIENTS TECH

Most Droyne suffer from a superstitious terror of Ancients devices and sites, and will not go anywhere near them if they have the choice. Those designated to use, tend or simply preserve knowledge of Ancients devices may not be any less afraid but are able to conquer the fear through knowledge. The Ancients Tech skill is used when figuring out the function of a device or installation and more commonly to use a device that has been preserved since the time of the Ancients.

APPEAL

The Appeal skill deals with what might be termed internal diplomacy in Droyne society. External interactions are governed by Diplomat as usual but Appeal is used when a Droyne wants a superior or the Droyne in charge of a different group – this might be a force of Warriors or an entire planetary Oytrip – to hear what they have to say. Success ensures the Droyne has observed the correct formalities – if not they will not be heard at all – in addition to presenting the case well.

ART (DROYNE)

Droyne art is not purely decorative. It conveys information and may even play a part in the correct function of an installation or device. A starship that is decorated properly will 'feel' better to her crew and might actually perform better. A basic level of skill in Art (Droyne) allows the creation of proper decoration for routine purposes. At skill level 2 the Droyne can create informative and 'improving' art, such as that which is felt to make a starship jump better. At skill level 4 the Droyne can create psionic trigger-art, which conveys detailed information by triggering the observer's brain to essentially imagine what the artist wanted them to.

CASTE (CASTE)

There are six caste-related skills – Warrior, Drone and so forth – which can only be received by members of that caste. This skill indicates how well the Droyne can perform the routine duties of their caste, including rituals and operation of devices. It is tied almost directly to rank within the caste. Droyne do not have a formal rank structure in the usual sense but each time a Droyne gains a level in their caste Profession skill they are likely to take on more responsibility. The Leader-of-Leaders with the highest Caste (leader) skill in an Oytrip is in overall charge, even if there is – for example – a Leader-of-Warriors with a higher Caste (leader) skill.

FLIGHT

Flight skill governs the use of Droyne wings to fly or control a fall, and can be used in unusual situations with the referee's permission. For example, a Droyne might 'fly' instead of using standard microgravity manoeuvres. This is tricky, and would require some high-difficulty Flight checks unless the Droyne has experience of this sort of thing, but it could be done.

More commonly, the Flight skill is used to carry out manoeuvres with precision or grace. Landing is Routine (6+) under most circumstances but making an emergency landing without coming to harm is more tricky. The check would be Average (8+) at least and possibly higher if the Droyne is struggling with adverse conditions. A Droyne whose END has dropped to zero due to a wound whilst flying fast around a set of crags in a gusty wind will face a check of Difficult (10+) level or more, suffering 1D damage for every point of negative Effect.

Flight skill also limits what the Droyne can do whilst flying. A flying Droyne can never receive a DM higher than their Flight skill to carry out any physical task including striking with a weapon. The best sniper in Charted Space will be impaired by their flapping wings, air currents and minor disturbances in relative motion path. Solving differential equations is also quite tricky but such mental functions are not affected to anything like the same degree.

OUTSIDER (RACE OR CULTURE)

Outsider skill is used when conducting dealings with non-Droyne. A high skill level does not suggest the Droyne has any particular liking for the species in question but they will understand the subject culture. This permits diplomacy to be undertaken without utterly confusing the outsiders but has wider implications. A Droyne with Outsider (vargr) skill, for example, is aware that Vargr conduct trade and warfare very differently to Droyne. They may be able to predict what goods will sell well in Vargr markets, or how a military campaign will unfold. A skill check can be used to make reasonable and general predictions about members of the subject race or culture.

In addition, where responses of the subject are important – such as using Broker skill to negotiate a good deal – the Droyne cannot receive a DM greater than their Outsider skill with the relevant culture. The converse is also true; an outsider trying to use advanced negotiating skills will find they are lost on a Leader who does not comprehend much of what is being said. A Leader who is supported by those with this skill can use the highest level available as an enabler for his own skills. If, for some reason, the Droyne decide to explain what they are doing or why, Outsider skill is used to frame this in terms the outsiders can comprehend. Since few Droyne have this skill, much of what they say and do remains utterly incomprehensible to outsiders.

SPECIAL PSIONIC TALENT: INVISIBILITY

Invisibility is considered to fall within the Telepathy field, since it acts upon the minds of others, but it is believed to be available to all Droyne and Chirpers as an instinctive ability. The user is not actually invisible; they can be seen as normal by cameras, motion detectors and other devices, or by psionically shielded individuals. What happens is that the target fails to notice the 'invisible' Droyne due to distractions, something more interesting or some other circumstance.

The Invisibility power is activated instinctively by untrained individuals but can be selected by anyone who has the Telepathy ability. If uncontrolled, it activates whenever an individual feels threatened. If active, it affects all unshielded minds within 400 metres. This can be awkward if the sudden disappearance was unintentional. To be affected, a being must possess at least rudimentary intelligence. A Droyne or Chirper could thus become undetectable to a snake or a shark but very primitive creatures (and plants) will not be affected.

Those affected by the Invisibility power will normally be quite unable to spot the Droyne using the ability and will temporarily forget about them. Even attempts to draw attention to the 'invisible' Droyne will fail. A shielded individual may be amused to see their companions fiddling with equipment, gazing intently at a discarded pizza box or updating their social media status whilst a party of Droyne wanders by but will find they also fail to notice attempts to point the Droyne out.

There are limitations to this power. People under threat will snap back to focus and will be able to perceive the 'invisible' Droyne providing they realise the threat is coming from them. A shielded Traveller who strikes their companion to try to alert them will more than likely find themselves the target of annoyance or even retaliation, even as the Droyne Warriors are levelling their plasma guns. However, the Invisibility power is relatively subtle and the target's subconscious can break through with a warning. Essentially the target's conscious mind is directed to other things but their eyes still see and their brain still processes the information. A gun pointed at the Traveller will usually be enough of a threat to make them take notice. There are innumerable tales of ambushes by Droyne along the lines of 'they were right on top of us before we saw them' or 'we had no idea they were there until they opened fire'.

In a situation where an 'invisible' Droyne presents a clear threat to someone, such as aiming a weapon, or causes such a disturbance that the Traveller cannot fail to notice it, the Traveller may make an Average (8+) Recon or INT check to realise what is happening. The difficulty falls to Routine (6+) if the Droyne causes harm to the Traveller. It is still possible that the Traveller might get hurt yet fail to perceive the Droyne who just shot them. In this case the Traveller will misinterpret the situation and believe the damage came from some other source but can make another check each round until the reality of the situation finally intrudes.

A Droyne or Chirper who is spotted can disappear again once the target loses track of them, either in a chaotic fight situation or due to losing line of sight.

Invisibility is a level 0 power, requiring no PSI points to use or maintain. The user's mind must be conscious to use the power. It is different to the capability of the G482 creature (see page 37) to remain unacknowledged, although there is probably a common origin of the technique in terms of parts of the brain stimulated.

DROYNE EQUIPMENT AND WEAPONRY

Yusote's followers favour energy weapons for their warriors. Technicians, Drones and Sports might be armed with a small weapon for self-defence but they are not combatants as such. Workers will not be armed but are still willing to protect their Leader by getting in the way of attacks. Weapons, like all Droyne technology, are not designed for human hands and would impose DM-2 even if someone could use them. Weaponry and most devices are psionically activated and will not function for someone who is not attuned. This is not a 'cannot find the safety catch' situation but one in which there is no physical trigger.

LEADER-ROD

Yusote carries a short rod, or baton, apparently as a badge of office. It is beautifully decorated with patterns that indicate his status and career history, and acts as both a tool and a weapon. A leader-rod is conferred rather than bought; the price indicated is what such a device might bring on the collectors market.

All functions are psionically triggered, with no external controls. The rod contains a communications device and a holographic projector that can be used to display maps or other information. There is also a laser capable of being used as a designator or a weapon. In designator mode the internal power cell is good for days of use without recharging but the rod can only deliver 20 shots with the laser before being depleted. A shot does 3D+3 damage.

DEFENCE ROD

Some of Yusote's followers are equipped with 'defence rods' which are similar to his leader-rod but much less ornate. They also contain a laser weapon but are less powerful than the version carried by Leaders.

ECLIPSE SHIELD

The eclipse shield is a large but lightweight shield carried by some warriors. It is said to resemble a planet in partial eclipse, with a crescent shaped primary edge extending well beyond the user's flank and a concave secondary edge. This permits a Warrior to use a firearm in the other hand, turning their body to receive protection then angling back to shoot. Eclipse shields are near-transparent, giving observers the impression of a shimmering 'force-field' protecting their users.

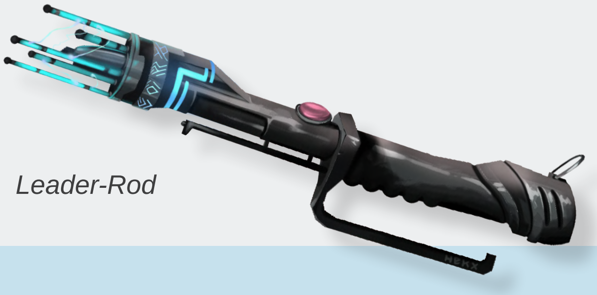
Eclipse shields are not intended for close combat, although they will serve if necessary. Their role is to stop projectiles and energy weapon discharges. In melee combat, an eclipse shield functions as a normal shield but against firearms the user is treated as being in cover (Protection +8, as per page 78 of the *Traveller Core Rulebook*). A second Droyne can shelter behind the shield of another but cannot make attacks without moving out from behind its cover.

In addition, an eclipse shield has a small power cell and a layer of microcircuitry set into its outer face. This is often used to project a bright light from the front face of the shield, which extends a little way above and below the normal visual spectrum. This has the effect of dazzling thermal and optical sensors, and providing illumination of a target. The light is unidirectional, so even if the shield is transparent the user is not dazzled. In low-light conditions this imposes DM-2 to attack rolls against those behind the shields.

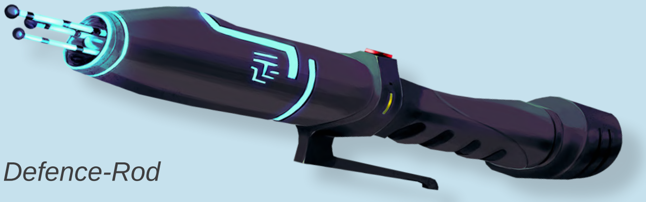
Bright light drains the power cell in an hour or so but a comfortable level of illumination can be maintained for weeks. The circuitry can also act as a heat exchanger for a limited time. It can be expended in a single pulse, reducing the damage from an incoming energy or cold attack by 1D of damage. This is determined randomly at the moment the shield is expended. Thereafter it is useful only as a physical shield. More commonly, the shield's hot/cold capability is used to augment the comfort and gravitas of a Leader. A group of warriors standing around a Leader can modify local conditions to maintain a comfortable temperature within the ring of shields. This requires at least four shields forming a ring, with shields no more than two metres apart. Enough eclipse shields can protect a large group from a storm or freezing conditions for several hours.

PLASMA CARBINE

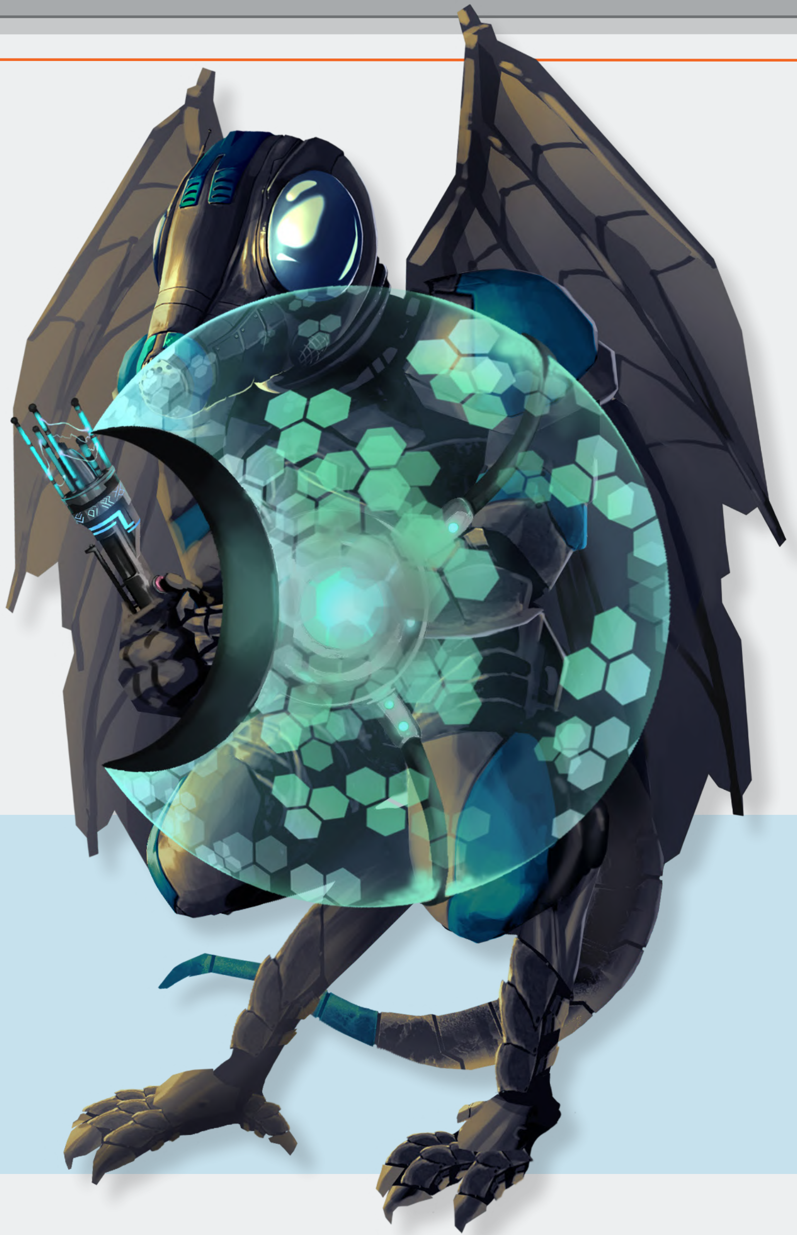
This unusual weapon is intended to be used in conjunction with an eclipse shield but can be employed without one leaving the user's left hand free. It has a pistol-type grip at its centre point but instead of a stock there is a sleeve which fits around a Droyne's arm. In effect, this creates a rather clumsy, heavy handgun-type weapon capable of delivering a blast of plasma. If the other hand is used to steady the weapon it is used like any other longarm. If not, DM-2 applies to attack rolls against any target beyond 25 metres. The weapon is powered by a belt unit and is psionically triggered.



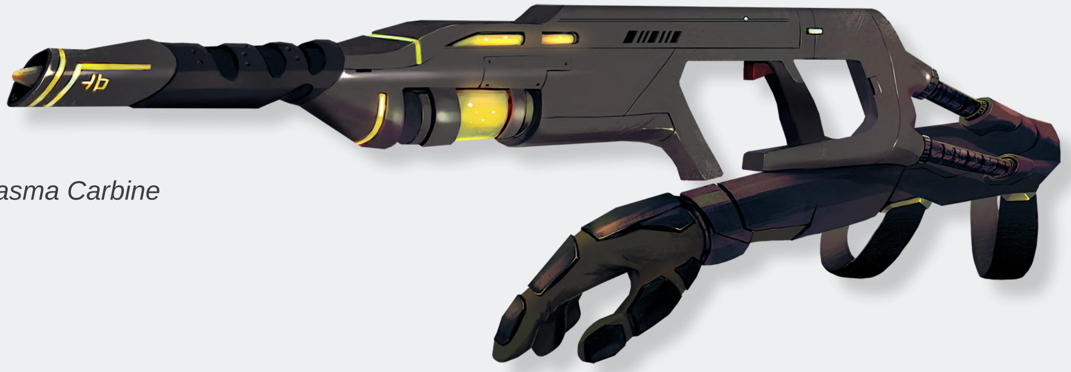
Leader-Rod



Defence-Rod



Eclipse Shield



Plasma Carbine

WEAPON	TL	RANGE	DAMAGE	KG	COST	MAGAZINE	POWER PACK COST	TRAITS
Yusote's Leader-Rod	15	40	3D+3	1	Cr150000	20	—	Zero-G
Defence-Rod	15	25	3D	0.7	Cr50000	10	—	Zero-G
Eclipse Shield	12	—	1D	2	Cr20000	N/A	—	—
Plasma Carbine	15	100	5D+2	4	Cr250000	50	—	—

DROYNE ARMOUR

Droyne use similar body armour to other races, although tailored rather differently. Most armour includes armoured wing cases which preclude the use of wings even if the Droyne is strong enough to fly in heavy armour. Droyne use their wings to assist in balance, so basic armour that covers and protects them causes problems with mobility. A Droyne using basic combat armour or any sort of rigid torso protection suffers DM-1 on all checks that require movement or balance. More expensive body armour either allows the wings to move freely or encases them in a powered covering that mimics their movements.

FIGHTING-ARMOUR

Fighting-armour is similar to the Droyne equivalent of combat armour but incorporates a mechanism for mimicking the movement of wings which are encased within a flexible component. It thus does not impose a penalty on tasks requiring balance. In addition, a Droyne equipped with fighting-armour can unfurl their wings to slow a descent. It is not possible to fly wearing this armour without additional thrust but an airborne assault can be made from a starship or suitably high position.

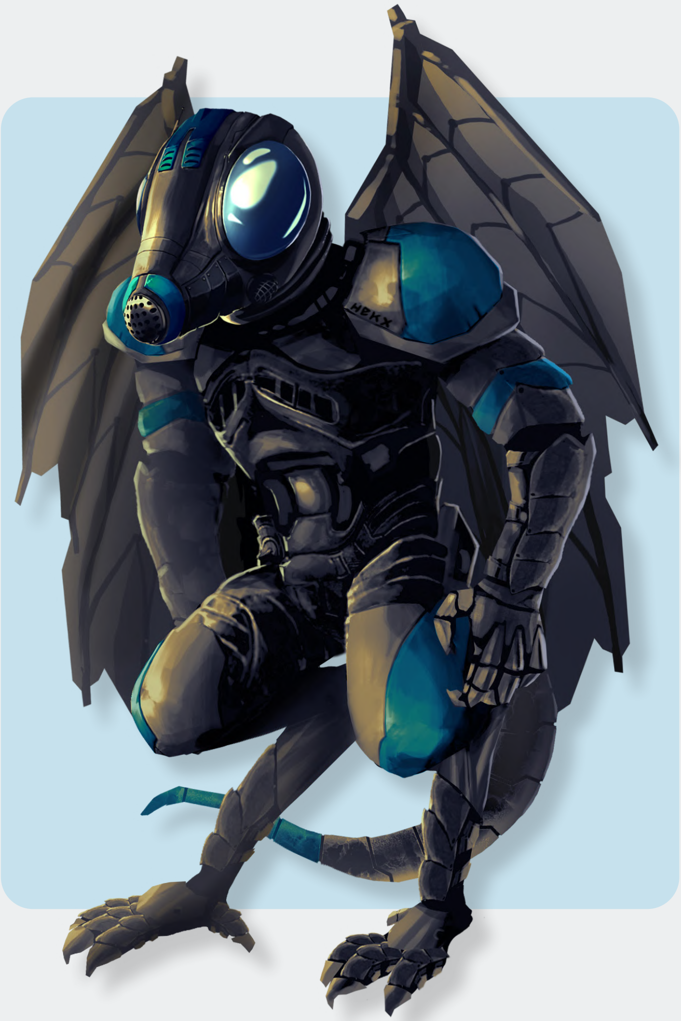
It has a flexible base layer with rigid armour plates over it, life support and cooling systems, and tactical displays. Power cells are good for 24 hours of operation. This is longer than most races could stand being encased in armour but if the suit is donned with the right ceremony a Warrior's mental resilience is boosted sufficiently to make long-duration operations tolerable.

Standard fighting-armour can be augmented with one or both of two accessories. The first is a short-duration thrust pack. This is a cheap chemical-based device held in a canister with a protector plate to prevent the exhaust gases from burning the user. It gives a total of one minute of thrust sufficient to allow a running take off from level ground. There is no throttle; the canister burns a packet of chemicals and delivers one round of full thrust each time it is activated. Level flight requires one burn every other round; a glide from greater altitude requires one burn every three rounds. Once thrust is expended the Droyne can make a controlled fall but cannot maintain a glide for more than a few seconds. A thrust pack costs Cr100 and is likely to be available in large numbers.

The second accessory is essentially the innards of a grav belt, fitted into receptacles on the armour. The unit costs Cr60000 and cannot be used off the armour. When in place the belt allows up to four hours of flight before it needs recharging. Grav units are not standard issue for most Droyne Warriors, but when they are used it is typical to use the grav unit to get into position close to a target then shut it off and glide/fall onto the enemy. This reduces electromagnetic signature and increases speed.

LEADING-ARMOUR AND SERVING-ARMOUR

Yusote has a set of 'leading-armour' which is similar to that used by his warriors. It is much more ornate, which would increase its value to a collector. Non-combatant followers have available a suit of serving-armour intended to permit them to function alongside the warriors at need – though not as combatants. It is lighter, offering Protection +10, and is decorated to a level befitting the wearer's status.



ARMOUR TYPE	PROTECTION	TL	RAD	KG	COST	REQUIRED SKILL
Fighting-Armour	+15	12	130	14	Cr92000	Vacc Suit 0

PROJECT GANNESSA

The Third Imperium has a number of official research installations, which are given Greek letters as designation. The locations of these are normally acknowledged along with their field of research, although it is widely assumed that the stations have additional projects or may be a front for something unpalatable. It is not uncommon for protests to be organised at or involving official research stations, or for inquisitive individuals to attempt to penetrate the installations.

Research Station Gamma, located on Vanejen, is officially listed as involved in research into a range of species found in the Spinward Marches, producing a slow but steady stream of academic papers detailing their behaviour and characteristics. This information is accepted by the scientific community and fits with existing knowledge, so it is safe to assume it is the result of dull but rigorous scientific research. The occasional 'briefly fascinating' piece of information comes out of Research Station Gamma but for the most part the installation is considered as being of little interest to the average person.

The research going on at the station is real but is a cover for research into psionics. Some of the creatures selected for study have properties connected with psionic abilities, although these are never mentioned in publicly available data. The installation is making progress but the science of psionicology is imprecise at best. There are concerns at a high level about the methods in use at Research Station Gamma but for at least some of those in power, results trump ethics.

Gamma has made a number of interesting and at times alarming discoveries. Among them was the creature designated G482. Several specimens were found in an abandoned Ancients facility, mostly wrecked, and had clearly been in stasis for a very long time. They were initially brought to Gamma but the decision was soon made to create a separate research project elsewhere; partly for security reasons and partly to allow Omicron Division to take over research into the possibility of using these creatures as weapons.

The endeavour was designated Project Gannessa, possibly in reference to Ganesha, an ancient Terran god of wisdom, knowledge and tenacious problem-solving. It is ostensibly a commercial research group conducting 'contract research of a sensitive nature' for the Imperial authorities. Numerous such projects exist, normally run by private concerns to undertake research on behalf of a client. Most specialise, and many end up on contract to world governments or elements of the Imperial administration, but some will take on multiple small projects from various private clients and conduct them in the strictest confidence. Gannessa is officially one of those but in reality it is engaged in what can only be termed 'psionic warfighting' research.

A lot of the work done by Project Gannessa is theoretical, or involves trying to figure out if a given Ancients device could be a weapon or protect against one. Attempts to replicate Ancients devices with TL15 equipment are usually clunky and hazardous, when they work at all. Blue-sky projects include electronic psi-jammer technology and even artificial telepathy. As yet it is not clear if these are viable fields of research, let alone if useful equipment could be produced.

Project Gannessa has several covert facilities, one of which is operated under the cover of the Fuller Experimental Mining Installation on Calefaction. This installation is sufficiently remote to make security a minor problem at most and is concealed within real research. Only a few of the personnel there are connected with Gannessa; most are genuinely engaged in planetology and extreme-conditions mining research.

The specimens transferred from Research Station Gamma were installed at Fuller several months ago, not long before Sorrel arrived. Their containment facility displaced some other equipment, to the annoyance of the base staff, but the peculiar effects of the creature meant there was an easy solution to that problem. Most people seeing a G482 immediately forgot its existence and lost any interest in going into the part of the installation used to study them. However, the mental strain caused by this shift in perceived reality was detrimental to the health of several workers. Combined with the stress of the working environment and other tensions, the introduction of G482 to Fuller was a time bomb.

G482, CHIRPERS AND DROYNE

It has long been postulated that Chirpers can make themselves invisible by telepathic means. Both Gamma and Gannessa are investigating this, along with the possibility of a link between Chirpers, Droyne and Ancients. There is some evidence that the Ancients were Droyne or perhaps some kind of super-Chirper, and that the two species are closely related. The project investigated indications that immature Droyne are essentially Chirpers and that some kind of trigger or uplift process might enable the semi-sentient Chirpers to become Droyne. This is not widely accepted at present, although does fit with the majority of evidence about the nature of the Ancients.

G482

Physically, G482 takes the form of an upright biped, not dissimilar to a Chirper or Droyne but physically more solid. They do not have wings but possess vestigial attachments which suggests the G482 evolved or was modified. The creatures are not sentient but are very cunning and possess deadly claws. These are stronger and sharper than any known naturally occurring variant, leading the scientists of Project Gannessa to believe the creatures are genetically engineered.

This hypothesis is correct. Immature Droyne are more or less indistinguishable from Chirpers but undergo a process which triggers rapid development of physique and brain, which places the adult Droyne in one of the six recognised castes of Droyne society. A different set of triggers can cause the immature Droyne to develop differently. It may be that G482 is only one variant. Why there is not more of this creature or other variants is at present an open question. Perhaps the Droyne have forgotten how to trigger this development, or maybe they find it distasteful to turn a potential sentient person into a lethal animal. Whatever the reason, the process is not used by any known Droyne group and may be lost to them. This information may not become known to the Travellers during this campaign but by the time they have completed *Secrets of the Ancients* the Travellers should have a good idea who the Ancients were.

G482 was created by the Ancients as a biological weapon system, or perhaps an invisible assassin. It was targeted at the Ancients' servitor races – humans, Vargr and others – and was given a talent that enabled it to move unseen among them, wiping out an entire community without effort. Although derived from Droyne, G482 is more biological robot than living creature. It cannot breed and can only be created by converting immature Droyne.

Although these creatures are armed with only claws and teeth, they are extremely strong and tough. What makes them so deadly is that most people cannot see them; more accurately, they are unable to acknowledge the presence or existence of the creature. This is not psionic invisibility as such but something slightly different; psionic invisibility is a direct effect imposed upon the mind of the observer. Someone with a psionic shield – natural or artificial – would not be subject to the invisibility. The G482 effect is different.

When the Ancients took various species from their homeworlds they engaged in genetic manipulation. This was typically to increase usefulness in the form of raised intelligence or being able to survive in difficult environments. However, some traits were also implanted, among these were mental triggers. The most benign was the ability to rapidly uplift certain species. Patterns and designs, meaningless to most, would trigger an imagined-memory which enabled information to be implanted in a suitable individual. This may tie into the Droyne casteing ceremony and was thought by the Gannessa scientists to be possible with other species to a greater or lesser degree.

More sinister were what might be termed obedience habits and pre-programmed behaviours. These were set up to be triggered by certain stimuli. In some cases these are telepathic commands but often the stimuli are patterns and designs. As a result, human and other servitors could be triggered when they entered specific areas simply upon seeing swirling designs on walls. Exactly what behaviour or action was triggered might vary according to programming but some traits were conditioned into the core of servitors' being. Among these was the inability to acknowledge the existence of the creature now known as G482.

A BIOLOGICAL DEAD-MAN SWITCH

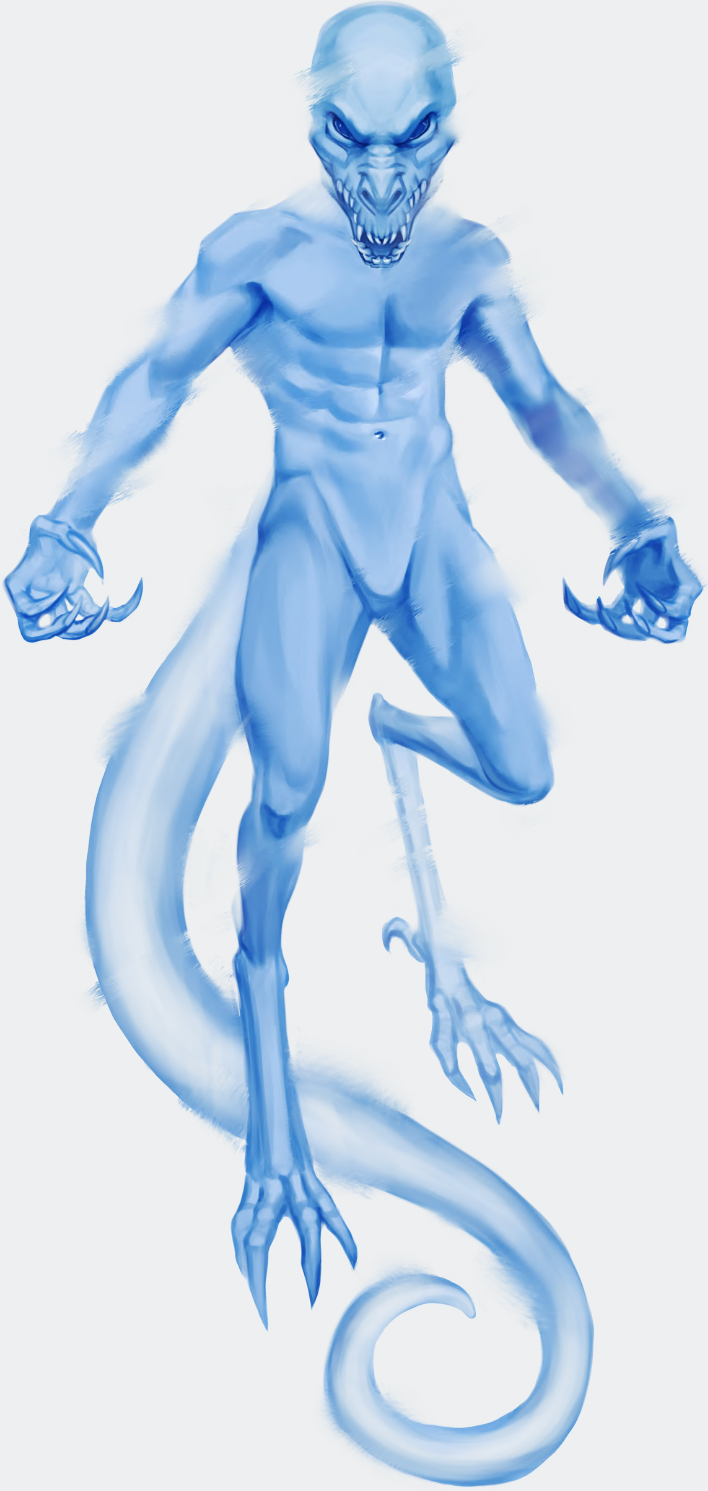
G482 was created to control servitor populations. If a small group of Ancients lost control over a much larger population of servants, these creatures could be released to rectify the situation. They were a response and also a threat, albeit an unusual one. It may be that servitor populations knew that something had happened to the rebellious groups but would never know exactly what. The Ancients could control their creations but without oversight they are a random weapon. It is quite possible that the 'failed colonies' occasionally found suffered mysterious deaths from these creatures until there were too few people left to form a viable community.

This trait was engineered into all the sentient races modified by the Ancients. This includes Vargr and most humans, even if they were otherwise not altered. Anyone whose bloodline is descended from the people left behind on Earth and contains absolutely no genes from humans of Zhodani, Vilani or other Ancients-transplanted groups, is totally immune to the 'invisibility' effect. Aslan, Hivers and K'Kree are also immune, as are other races untouched by the Ancients.

G482 has a metabolism based on ambient energy rather than breaking down food, although it needs protein to grow new tissue. Under normal circumstances – room temperature and normal light conditions – the creature functions at its base rate. However, the availability of additional energy in useful forms such as direct sunlight can allow G482 to function at a higher level. Reduced energy hampers it.

The composition of the creature is such that most weapons are relatively ineffective. Penetrating attacks such as bullets and harpoons are reduced from using 1Ds to D3s – so a firearm normally dealing 3D-3 damage does only 3D3-3 to G482. Most other attacks – including crushing implements and direct energy such as lasers, fire or electricity, apply a modifier of -1 per damage dice; a flamethrower doing 5D damage does 5D-5 to G482. Cutting attacks do normal damage.

The creature has an energy reserve equal to five times its hits (normally 165 for a creature with 35 hits), which is replenished by absorbing energy from its surroundings. When the energy reserve reaches 0 the creature becomes dormant. Normally, energy



Animal	**Hits**	**Speed**
G482	35	8m
Skills	Melee (natural) 2, Recon 1, Stealth 3, Survival 1	
Attacks	Claws and Teeth (2D+2)	
Traits	Heightened Senses	
Behaviour	Special	

G482 Energy Levels

Level	State	DM on Checks	Additional
80% and above (typically 132+)	Normal	+0	All functions normal
60–79% (typically 99-131)	Slowed	-1	Movement slowed by 25%
40–59% (typically 66-98)	Greatly Slowed	-2	Movement slowed by 50%
20–39% (typically 33-65)	Depleted	-4	Movement slowed by 75%
0–19% (typically 0-32)	Highly Depleted	-6	Movement slowed by 90%
Negative	Dormant	N/A	N/A

is replenished by ambient heat and radiation but some environments leach energy faster than it can be replenished. A depleted G482 can regenerate energy by breaking down its own tissues, exchanging 1D energy reserve for every point it reduces its maximum hits by. Tissue can be used up in this manner at a rate of one Hit every 1D minutes.

For example, a G482 has run out of energy reserve in cold conditions but retains its full 35 hits as it has not actually been injured. It could slog on at greatly reduced capability or replenish energy at the expense of greatly accelerated use of its own tissues as a food source. It chooses to do the latter. Every 1D minutes the creature loses 1 from its maximum hits and gains 2D energy. In this case the G482 burns 7 hits, reducing its maximum hits to 28. It gains 14D points of energy, enabling it to return to full function for a time. In order to regain the lost maximum hits the creature needs high-protein food as well as plentiful energy.

The energy reserve can be used to power through a low-energy area. It is used up along the way but can be replenished by finding available energy. The energy reserve can also be used to heal damage at the rate of 1D energy for every hit restored, at one hit per combat round. This can only be done for wounds and similar injuries. Regaining lost hits due to burning tissue requires 2D kilograms of high-protein food, such as human flesh, per hit restored.

Normally, a G482 gains more energy than it needs from its surroundings and in some cases it can regenerate constantly without depleting reserves. However, in low-energy environments this may not be possible. If its energy reserve falls below 80% of maximum the creature suffers DM-1 on all checks and is noticeably slowed. Additional effects are noted on the G482 Energy Levels table.

If the G482 can be reduced to a negative energy level it will become dormant and remain so until its energy level rises above 0. A dormant creature can trade body tissue for energy and may be partially aware of its surroundings. This enables it to lurch unexpectedly back into life sometime after collapsing.

ENERGY ABSORPTION

The G482 absorbs energy from its surroundings at a rate determined by local temperature and radiant energy levels.

Cold conditions overcome warm ones. For example, a G482 which is in direct sunlight but being sprayed with fire extinguishers will lose eight points of energy per round and gain none.

THE INVISIBILITY EFFECT

Those affected are conditioned not to be aware of these creatures and to construct alternate explanations for their actions. The effect is broken if the G482 attacks someone but a friend standing nearby might remain wholly unaware of what is happening. Survivors (which are rare) usually forget about the creature within minutes – effectively, they edit it out of their consciousness. Thus a survivor may know that some friends were killed but not how. They may make up a convincing explanation, say concocting a vivid memory of an accident or a friend who got drunk and went berserk. Alternatively, they may simply not know what happened.

This conditioning is keyed in part to the creature's appearance and movement patterns. It is possible to watch a security camera tape of one and not be aware of the creature despite it tearing someone apart on-screen. The watcher may actually see the victim die and not be able to explain it but more often they will simply watch the tape then put it aside, remembering

G482 Energy Absorption

Conditions	Energy gained/lost per Round	Example
Extremely Energetic	+8	Great heat, such as in a fire. The creature will suffer half the physical damage a normal being would but will be able to regenerate this afterward using the energy gained.
High Energy	+5	Bright lights, uncomfortably high ambient temperature (for a human).
Elevated Energy	+3	Bright sunlight, such as on Callia.
Normal	+1	Room temperature, direct sunlight.
Reduced Energy	0	Outdoors at night.
Low Energy	-4	Cold conditions, below freezing.
Extremely Low Energy	-8	Carbon-dioxide fire extinguisher or similar low-temperature gas.
Cryogenic	-16	Cryogenic fluids.

only that there was nothing interesting on it. The cues for this effect are a mix of appearance and movement. The creatures move in a curious, ever-changing rhythm and pattern which acts as a trigger for the conditioning. A badly wounded creature might not be able to perform the movements correctly and could suddenly become visible to everyone around.

Those who have seen G482, even those attacked, will edit it out of their consciousness as soon as the immediate threat subsides. Each will construct a memory of something that could explain what happened, or be absolutely sure they were not present. Their belief is sincere and the memory they create is indistinguishable from a real one. Someone who has a different explanation must have remembered it wrong or confused some people with others. Even pointing out jarring differences in stories about how someone died does not work – the individual simply cannot accept the existence of the creatures. This can lead to tragic consequences such as a person being unable to remember the existence of lifelong friends or their own children. The Ancients were not concerned with such trivialities when they made their weapon.

G482 does not possess the telepathic invisibility that some species, notably Chirpers, do. This means that it must rely on natural stealth and cunning. Animals will react to the creature like any other predator, which might alert people nearby. However, as soon as they lay eyes upon the creature they will discount its existence and might well wander around trying to calm spooked animals whilst the G482 rips their friends apart. Similarly, robots and automated systems are not affected and can detect the creatures as normal. However, a Traveller standing next to a security robot that is sounding its siren and firing at a creature, spattering tissue fluid all over the Traveller, will probably think they are in danger from a malfunctioning robot.

The pseudo-invisibility effect does not prevent a person's subconscious from being aware of a threat and trying to do something about it, leading to a feeling of dread or terror, depending on the creature's proximity. This survival-imperative can break through the conscious mind's refusal to 'see' G482 and once the conditioning is fully broken then the character will become permanently immune to the invisibility effect. Tissue fluid stains, wounds on people and other effects will be visible and noticeable to anyone who sees them. However, any recognisable body part, such as a claw, will trigger the 'that's not there' conditioning in someone who has seen a G482. This can lead to a weird situation where someone finds a severed limb from one of the creatures, investigates it and make copious notes, then sees a creature and forgets about the whole thing. In such cases, items that jar with the preferred reality of the creature not existing will be concealed or destroyed.

Each time a Traveller survives an encounter with the G482, their chances of becoming immune increase. It is also possible to work around the conditioning. Travellers in an altered state of consciousness can often bypass the conditioning, so an extremely drunk Traveller or one full of psychotropic drugs may be able to see what their sober companions cannot. Similarly, a Traveller who is genuinely insane or semi-conscious from a blow to the head may be able to see the creatures clearly. Even severe pain from an injury can break through the conditioning. However, most people do not survive long enough to develop immunity.

DEFEATING THE INVISIBILITY EFFECT

Some people are completely unaffected – anyone whose bloodline was never tampered with by the Ancients can see the creatures unless natural stealth allows them to remain concealed. Thus Solomani humans of completely pure blood, Aslan, Hivers, K'kree and species untouched by the Ancients are immune to this effect. Conversely, Vargr and some Droyne seem even more susceptible. However, even in these cases the conditioning is not perfect.

The conditioning can be bypassed temporarily by a person's survival instincts and can be thrown off completely. When a Traveller is in proximity to one of these creatures, they may roll to see if the conditioning is temporarily broken. If this roll is successful, the Traveller may immediately roll again. If the second roll is also successful, they are now permanently de-conditioned and can always perceive the creatures. They will also be able to remember all previous instances in which they encountered G482. The Referee could have some fun with that, as the Traveller realises that one of these things once tore someone to bits in front of them and it had been edited it out of their memory. Of course, that implies that there are others out there – or perhaps other creatures and people able to do the same trick.

In any case, the chance to throw off the conditioning starts at a Very Difficult (12+) on a straight check and is the same for both first (temporary) and second (permanent) rolls. This is subject to the modifiers listed on the Invisibility Effect Factors table.

These modifiers are cumulative and permanent (except the last two, which last only as long as the condition is in effect), but a roll of 2 always indicates that the Traveller has failed to throw off the conditioning no matter what previous events have occurred.

For example, 'Vacc-Suit' Vance is the first-entry expert with a salvage crew who have stumbled upon a derelict ship floating in space. He sees the dismembered corpses of the crew as he enters the wreck and briefly spots the creature as it slinks out of sight. Normally Vance would have to roll a straight 12 to overcome his conditioning but the creature is in close proximity, worth DM +2. He needs to roll 10+ but gets a 7. Vance reports back that the crew are all dead, 'due to, uh, pirate attack maybe?' and forgets he saw the creature. His superiors are not impressed

Invisibility Effect Factors

Factor	Notes	DM on Temporary Check	DM on Permanent Check
Each previous distant encounter	G482 was within visual range but no immediate personal theat.	+1	+1
Each previous close encounter	G482 came close enough to pose a physical threat.	+2	+2
Creature is currently in close proximity	G482 is within 25m outdoors or in the same building (or part of a large building).	+2	+1
Traumatic event caused by creature	The Traveller witnessed someone seriously hurt or killed by G482.	+3	+1
Damage Taken from G482	G482 directly attacked the Traveller.	+6	+3
Somewhat altered mental state	The Traveller is not in their normal state of mind. This is likely to be caused by drunkenness or similar conditions but could also be a controlled mental illness.	+2	+1
Massively altered mental state	The Traveller's perception of reality is scrambled, for example due to psychotropic drugs or extreme mental illness.	+4	+2

at the obvious inaccuracy of the report (pirates would not mangle corpses like that; they tend to use guns) but cannot figure out how the crew died. They file the report as is. The creature sneaks aboard Vance's ship and lies low for a while.

Sometime later, Vance is disembarking when the creature leaves its hiding-place and dashes off across the landing field. He sees it briefly in the distance and can roll to throw off his conditioning. He gets DM+2 for the previous close encounter; there is no modifier for the present distant encounter so he needs 10+. Vance rolls another 7 and forgets that he saw anything. However, this encounter is worth another +1 on the dice if Vance ever runs into another creature. He does sort of recall it seeming odd that they flew with such a small crew on this mission and wonders who left their personal effects behind in the cabins… but then he is distracted by something else and forgets all about it.

Weeks later, Vance comes across a creature snacking on that new crewmember he had been looking out for. This is a close encounter (DM+3) and also deeply traumatic – the poor kid was just beginning to show some promise – for another DM+3. Vance already had DM+3 on the dice (+2 for a previous close encounter and +1 for a distant one makes +3); so his current DM is +9. He rolls another of those 7s but with the modifier this is 16 – a lot more than the 12 he needs. 'I see you…!' snarls Vance and shoots the living daylights out of the creature. He will be able to perceive this and any other G482 until the immediate crisis is over.

Afterward, Vance rolls to see if he has thrown off the conditioning permanently. If he fails the check he will not be able to remember exactly what happened… but in this case he makes it. Vance has permanently broken his conditioning. If he ever encounters another of these things he will be able to see it automatically. Equally importantly, he now remembers his previous encounters and what actually happened on those occasions. At this point Vance goes in search of a strong drink.

G482 PHYSIOLOGY AND BEHAVIOUR

G482 resembles a heavyset Droyne, with elongated claws and a fanged mouth in place of the 'beak'. When active it is in constant slight motion, leaning and moving its limbs in a pattern whose rhythm changes steadily over time. Travellers who remember seeing one might be reminded of a boxer's constant movements but there is something shockingly threatening about a G482 even when passive. It does not move in a defensive or ready-to-act manner; it moves in a manner that is *wrong*.

G482 can feed on matter, such as meat, as a means to obtain raw material to sustain and repair damage but their main energy source is direct absorption of radiation. For this reason their digestive systems are very small, although quick-acting. An autopsy of one might puzzle the Travellers, who would wonder how such a creature could power its formidable body. It would require a deep investigation of tissue makeup to discover that G482 absorbs all kinds of radiation into its body tissues to sustain itself.

The most useful source of energy is infrared radiation – heat. G482 becomes sluggish in low temperatures and must use its energy reserves to function in a cold environment. If cooled to very low temperatures, for example by immersion in liquid nitrogen, G482 will become dormant until its energy reserves are replaced. The creatures instinctively do this by drawing in heat from their surroundings. If little heat is available, for example at the bottom of a near-freezing pool of water, G482 can remain dormant indefinitely.

The heat transfer mechanism may be a variation on the psionic power of cryokinesis, forcing a transfer of heat from the surroundings at a rate higher than the laws of thermodynamics might normally allow. Other forms of radiation provide some sustenance; background gamma radiation, light, even electromagnetism or radio waves can be detected by the creatures and used to feed, although simply lying in sunlight is generally sufficient to replenish energy reserves.

This energy absorption ability is limited. G482 cannot gain energy from the impact of a bullet and will be injured by it like anyone else. Nor can it handle extremely high concentrations of energy. Fire or electricity will hurt the creature less than an unprotected human but it will cause harm all the same. G482 will retreat from concentrated energy of this sort and could theoretically be destroyed by enough of it. As an extreme example, there is no way one of these creatures could survive at ground zero of a nuclear explosion.

REFEREEING G482

G482 is a killing machine which will go after living beings and slaughter them in an animal-cunning way. It is instinctively aware of power systems and sources, and may deliberately take out a power conduit to deprive nearby humans of light. This is not a conscious plan; more of a programmed option. Likewise, it is programmed to kill rather than being driven by an imperative to feed. It will often attack one or two people then withdraw and hide rather than running amok until brought down.

The creature is extremely tough, with a composition that makes it very hard to kill. Even destruction of some organs will not stop G482, at least not immediately. One could function for days or even longer with no digestive system and even interrupting circulation will only slow the creature rather than immediately killing it. This is because G482 can run on energy stored in its cells and get more from its surroundings without the usual biological processes. It can even heal from critical organ damage, going into a dormant state and drawing in energy for emergency repairs. However, regrowing damaged tissue requires high-protein food of some kind; the bodies of the slain are entirely acceptable.

Although G482 is extremely tough it is possible to simply shoot the creature apart with conventional firearms – eventually – or to kill it with heavier weapons. However, delivering enough damage by this method is problematical given the tendency of the creature to move fast and kill people. Smart Travellers might find other ways around the problem, such as slowing it down by reducing its temperature or physically penning it up in some manner. The modified tranq drugs found aboard *Garnette* will also help.

G482 will retreat in the face of damage. Its programming revolves around the long game, wearing down enemies and ambushing those searching for it. To this end it has an imperative to preserve its effectiveness rather than winning the current fight. It is an assassin and hunter rather than a warrior, although once contact is made G482 will launch a savage all-out assault.

The creature can be fended off with attacks that do not do it all that much damage, or be driven into a trap if the Travellers are clever enough to lay one. The Referee should play the creature as semi-smart but also use this as a dramatic device. There are more opportunities for tension in an adventure where the creature is driven off after killing some of the townsfolk and makes repeated attempts to stalk the survivors, especially if the Travellers realise that their weapons are not very effective and begin looking for an alternative means to destroy their enemy. G482 is of more value to the Referee as a problem to solve than a simple bag of hits.

Some Travellers will just stand their ground, stubbornly blazing away with their guns, unable to accept that they cannot win that way. The Referee is encouraged to be merciless with such groups, for two reasons. The first is that by choosing to be ‘soft’ on such groups the Referee encourages Travellers to hold the game hostage – ‘let us win or you’ll have to kill us’, in effect.

The second reason is that *Traveller* is a game where actions and choices have consequences and the universe is not ‘fair’ or ‘play balanced’ in the sense that threats match the Travellers’ capabilities. A group that makes good decisions gains an advantage over their foes; it is only reasonable that poor decisions should lead to a disadvantage.

However, the Referee should give Travellers fair warning before massacring the lot of them. If finding a bunch of people dead with empty guns in their hands is not a broad enough hint, perhaps the Travellers might be attacked and manage to drive off the creature with firepower, then be informed that their guns were not apparently having much effect. This is not unrealistic; the creature knows that it needs to survive to strike another target and will draw off to seek an easier avenue of attack rather than charge through a fusillade – at least, most of the time. If the Travellers are told that their guns seemed to be hurting the creature but not doing much permanent harm and they just keep on relying on them, then some of them are going to die. They have no right to complain about this; they have had fair warning.

This adventure is initially about investigating the situation, then it becomes a tense fight for survival. That fight is made a lot more interesting if the Travellers have to think and improvise rather than planting their feet and blasting all comers into oblivion. The creature’s toughness and cunning should be used by the Referee to create an exciting, tense and hazardous adventure.

There is another factor at play here. This adventure is the beginning of a campaign in which the Travellers encounter devastating weaponry created by the Ancients. The Referee needs to educate them about the dangers they face before it is too late and instil a healthy respect for the hazards they are soon to encounter.

HUNTING G482

G482 poses some unusual problems for anyone wanting to kill or capture it. The first is remembering it even exists. Even if the Travellers have overcome their conditioning or are immune to the effect, others may not be. Their carefully laid ambush can be derailed by someone wandering off or loudly asking why everyone is hiding in the rocks. However, some of G482's abilities can be used against it.

The first option is to use automated sensors. It seems unlikely that the Travellers will have military-grade equipment available but something could be cobbled together in *Garnette's* workshop or improvised from other sources.

- Vehicle navigational radar can be set to detect a moving object within a certain size class and report the 'sighting'. Of course, it might also pick up people, bushes moving in the breeze and other false-positives.
- Seismic sensors might be able to detect a creature moving nearby. Filtering out things like distant vehicles and people moving around nearby would be a challenge but doable. There is no guarantee that this will be successfully accomplished even if the programmer thinks they have created a suitable filter.
- Optical and thermal cameras can see G482 perfectly well but a person who has not broken their conditioning will simply ignore the image. It might be possible for someone who has broken the conditioning to obtain an image and create a recognition program, although this would be quite a challenge.
- Ultrasound is of limited use in the thin air of Callia but could be some help. However, the creature will be able to detect ultrasound emitters and stay away from them most of the time.
- A surveying laser could be trained across an area and a sensor set to detect interruption of the beam.
- G482 constantly draws in thermal energy from its surroundings. Suitably sensitive equipment could be set to detect cold spots which might be hiding-places for the creature.

Other inventive solutions to detection are possible. However, the Referee should note that someone who hears an alarm and can see the creature but has not broken their conditioning will simply not notice it and probably walk right past it to kick the 'malfunctioning' sensor unit a couple of times.

Hunting with people is a highly dangerous occupation of course. Those who have broken the conditioning can see the creature so long as they have line of sight. Those who have not will only become aware of it when it attacks them, which is usually far too late. Thus hunting parties and human sentries are not a good idea unless the Travellers have no better options… or they fancy a 'picked off one-by-one' horror-movie style situation. If the creature is repelled from the town and slinks off, hunting it may be the only option. If not, then it is unlikely to be the best even if all other options are fairly poor.

TRAPPING G482

The alternative to wandering about hunting the creature is to either lie in wait or set a trap. 'Lying in wait' could also mean 'holing up with their backs to a wall and hoping it goes away', which it is unlikely to do. The most obvious 'trap' is the town itself. There is an abundance of both warmth and prey there which will attract the creature sooner or later. If the townsfolk are not warned and/or protected, they will be massacred like everyone else so far. Once the attack starts, some of them might be able to grab weapons but their fate is pretty much sealed. Even assisted by people who have broken the conditioning, they have little chance unless some improvised weapons and sensors can be brought into play. However, there are some good prospects for traps in the town. The cool warehouses will rob the creature of energy if it can be locked in for a time and other buildings will at least contain it.

G482 instinctively knows that radio-frequency signals are connected with targets and can home in on a transmission. The creature will not charge blindly up to a transmitter, however, but will stalk it and see what is going on before approaching. It is not interested in the transmissions themselves but the people likely to be nearby, so if there are no potential victims it will depart in search of a different target. However, a transmitter can be used to lure the creature in from a distance.

Heat will also attract G482. Normally it would not be too concerned with approaching heat sources but it has been weakened by a long period in cryo-stasis and will need several days to fully replenish its reserves. The creature would be most strongly attracted to a heat source not much in excess of human body temperature. It is programmed to attack people, who are likely to be found in warm – but not too warm – places. Something like an ATV with the heaters turned up full and a door left open would make an excellent trap. The creature might be cautious about entering but, hungry as it is for energy, would probably be compelled to go inside.

The creature would also approach a pool of burning fuel to bask in the heat emanating from it. This would be hot enough to cause damage but if the creature was desperate enough it might jump right in and accept some harm in return for a large amount of energy. More likely it would simply remain close by and enjoy the warmth.

Conversely, G482 does not like cold. It will try to go around pools of cold water and will not normally enter a very cold place. A Traveller hiding in a meat locker would be safe from the creature, although death by hypothermia is not a very attractive option. A jet of cold water, say from a hose, would be a barrier of sorts to the creature. It might choose to rush through if it had a reason but unless there was some pressing need it would look for a way around and could thus be channelled or kept away from an area – at least temporarily.

INCAPACITATING G482

As already noted, enough physical damage will dissociate G482's components from one another and cause it to become dormant or die. There are, however, other options.

COLD

The creature could be made to become dormant by chilling it sufficiently. Cryogenic fluids such as liquid nitrogen would be necessary for this to work quickly but immersion in very cold water or a good hosing down with carbon-dioxide fire extinguishers, decontamination hoses and the like would slow it and perhaps eventually cause it to collapse. The creature could be kept dormant in a low berth if that was desirable. It could also be chilled to dormancy and placed back in the repaired cryo pod. This is more likely to be in the hope of selling the discovery to someone rather than for 'conservation of rare species' purposes, which begs the question, is there anyone out there that the Travellers would trust with these creatures?

COLLISIONS

Running the creature over with a vehicle at low speed will actually harm it relatively little. The big studded gel-filled tires of an ATV will certainly hurt it but ground pressure is too low to crush it whilst smaller vehicles lack sufficient mass to cause serious harm. However, it might be possible to trap G482 under a vehicle for long enough to incapacitate it. Ramming at speed will certainly cause damage but the creature is fast enough to dodge if it realises what is happening.

BURNING

Burning the creature is an interesting proposition. It can pull in energy from its surroundings at a rapid pace and might be able to extinguish a burning chemical before taking excessive damage, emerging faster and stronger. However, intense heat can damage or even kill it, so immersion in a pool of blazing fuel might work if the creature could be kept in the intense heat for longer than it can stand. This is a risky prospect however.

GRAVITY

Gravity might be used one of two ways. If the creature were taken up to a great height in an air/raft (which would be more than slightly hazardous for the pilot!) then dropped, it would probably not survive. It could also be pushed off a building or cliff, although it might not fall far enough to kill it. The other use of gravity would be to drop something on it. Crushing or impacts from falling objects would cause harm and could kill the creature.

EXPLOSIVES

Simply blowing the creature up is also an option. Bombs, grenades, booby-traps, mines and even primitive explosive rockets could be improvised by the Travellers. A sufficiently large explosion would destroy the creature or dismember it to the point where it could not regenerate, allowing it to be contained or finished off.

DRUGS

The 'tranquilisers' discovered aboard *Garnette* are intended for use against G482 and contain a conventional universal sedative which actually does nothing to the creature. The other component is far more effective. This impedes the creature's ability to draw heat and other energy from its surroundings, effectively reducing the creature's energy reserve by 2D for every dose delivered.

GLISTEN SUBSECTOR AND DISTRICT 268

Mysteries of the Ancients takes place in the Glisten subsector, with possible forays into District 268. The Travellers may be able to move directly from one critical location to the next but it is more likely they will wander around to some extent. The Referee can make as much or as little of these side trips as necessary.

DISTRICT 268

District 268 contains 32 star systems, of which all are accessible by jump-1 ships from the Spinward Main or most worlds in Glisten. The area was given its designation by Imperial explorers in the early 600s and is today generally known by that name. Some charts refer to it by other names including Collace or Vilgot's Reach. The latter refers to an Early Sword Worlds exploration captain who charted the region. The Imperial name is most widely used, even in the Sword Worlds, but there are those who insist on using one of the other designations.

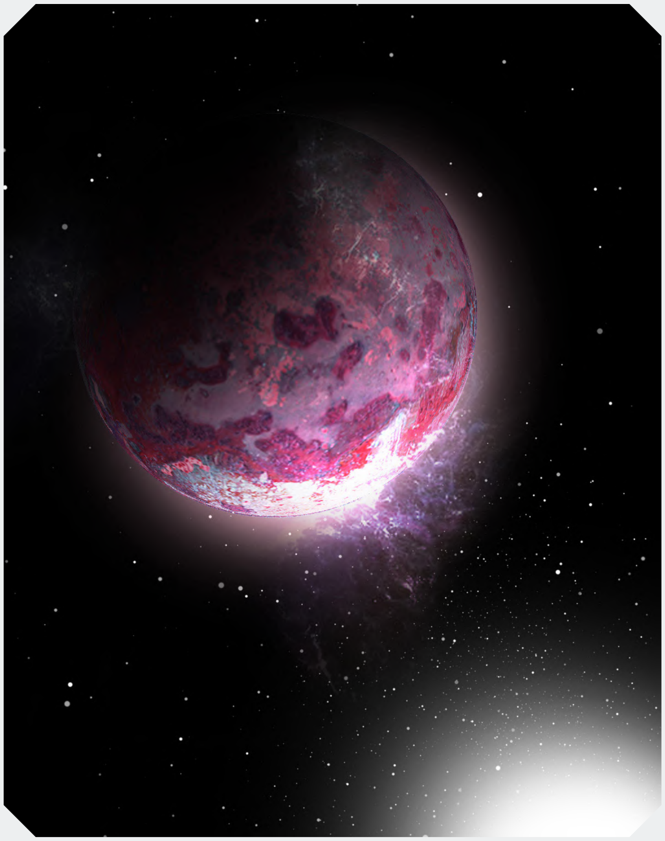
District 268 is influenced by the large economies of Imperial space to trailing, notably Glisten, but is almost entirely independent. The major world of Collace is generally pro-Imperial in outlook and is opposed by a business group named the Trexalon Technical Consortium (TTC) based on nearby Trexalon. Relations between the two vary from frosty to a state of 'trade war' which stops just short of open military conflict. Both powers are widely rumoured to be engaging in covert operations and support of corsair groups and are known to try to influence traders and companies operating in the region.

GLISTEN

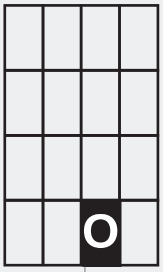
Glisten contains 29 star systems, of which the majority lie on the Spinward Main. The only other significant astrographic feature is the Ffudn cluster, a grouping of eight systems in the coreward-trailing corner of the subsector. With the exception of Ffudn itself these systems are of no importance other than as a jump-3 link to the Lunion subsector. This is beyond the reach of most commercial starships, so the cluster sees little traffic.

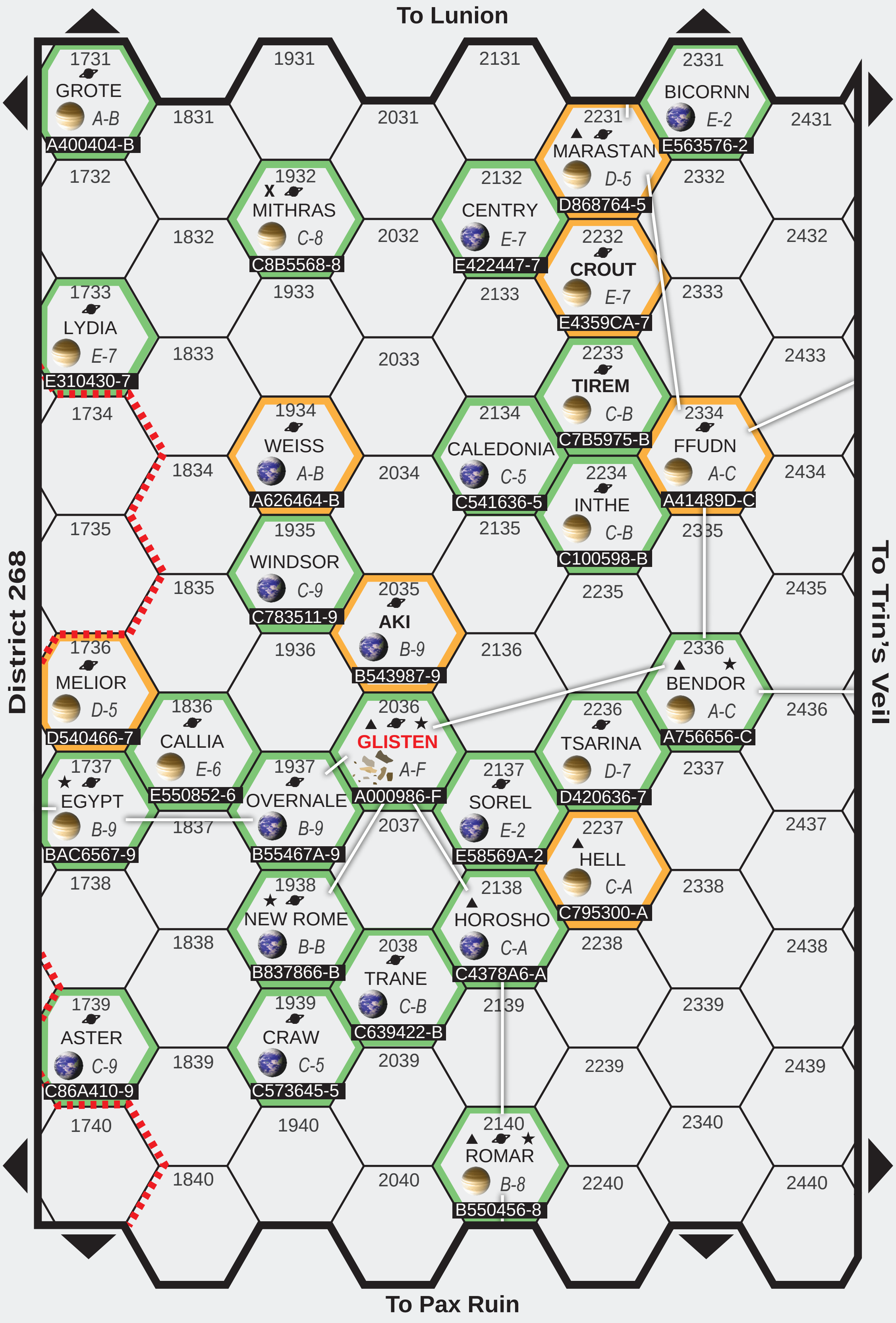
Similarly, the Ffudn cluster is of small strategic importance. It is the responsibility of the 100th Fleet, which has no bases in the cluster. A handful of small patrol vessels are assigned to commerce protection but spend more time showing the flag at Ffudn than in the rest of the cluster. Occasionally a task force makes a sweep but overall this is a quiet backwater whose lack of traffic makes it unviable for pirates and raiders.

The 100th Fleet is something of a dumping-ground for less talented captains and is not particularly efficient. Despite this it has also been assigned responsibility for patrols out into District 268 and keeping links open to the Imperial enclave in the Five Sisters. This mission is carried out by the bigger and newer ships of the 100th Fleet, which does not necessarily equate to having the best captains. Connections are as important to the navy – often more so – as competence. Thus a vessel encountered in District 268 is more likely to have a noble as captain as one in Glisten but neither are likely to be particularly imaginative.



Name	Location	Bases	Statistics	Trade Codes	Travel Code	Allegiance	Gas Giants
Aki	2035		B543987-9	Hi In Po	A	Imperium	G
Aster	1739		C86A410-9	Ni Wa		Imperium	G
Bendor	2336	N S	A756656-C	Ag Ni Ga		Imperium	
Bicornn	2331		E563576-2	Ni		Imperium	
Caledonia	2134		C541636-5	Ni Po		Imperium	
Callia	1836		E550852-6	De Po		Imperium	
Centry	2132		E422447-7	Ni Po		Imperium	
Craw	1939		C573645-5	Ni		Imperium	G
Crout	2232		E4359CA-7	Hi	A	Imperium	G
Egypt	1737	N	BAC6567-9	Fl Ni		Imperium	G
Ffudn	2334		A41489D-C	Ic	A	Imperium	G
Glisten	2036	N S	A000986-F	As Hi In Na Va		Imperium	G
Grote	1731		A400404-B	Ni Va		Imperium	G
Horosho	2138	S	C4378A6-A			Imperium	
Inthe	2234		C100598-B	Ni Va		Imperium	G
Lydia	1733		E310430-7	Ni		Imperium	
Marastan	2231	S	D868764-5	Ag Ri	A	Imperium	G
Melior	1736		D540466-7	De Ni Po	A	Imperium	G
Mithras	1932		C8B5568-8	Fl Ni		Imperium	G
New Rome	1938	N	B837866-B			Imperium	G
Overnale	1937		B55467A-9	Ag Ni		Imperium	G
Romar	2140	N S	B550456-8	De Ni Po		Imperium	G
Sorel	2137		E58569A-2	Ag Ni Ri		Imperium	G
Tirem	2233		C7B5975-B	Fl Hi In		Imperium	G
Trane	2038		C639422-B	Ni		Imperium	G
Tsarina	2236		D420636-7	De Na Ni Po		Imperium	G
Weiss	1934		A626464-B	Ni	A	Imperium	G
Windsor	1935		C783511-9	Ni		Imperium	
Wurzburg	2237	S	C795300-A	Lo	A	Imperium	




To Lunion
District 268
To Trin's Veil
To Pax Ruin
1731 GROTE A-B A400404-B
1831
1931
2031
2131
2231 ▲ MARASTAN D-5 D868764-5
2331 BICORNN E-2 E563576-2
2431
1732
1832
1932 X MITHRAS C-8 C8B5568-8
2032
2132 CENTRY E-7 E422447-7
2232 CROUT E-7 E4359CA-7
2332
2432
1733 LYDIA E-7 E310430-7
1833
1933
2033
2133
2233 TIREM C-B C7B5975-B
2333
2433
1734
1834
1934 WEISS A-B A626464-B
2034
2134 CALEDONIA C-5 C541636-5
2234 INTHE C-B C100598-B
2334 FFUDN A-C A41489D-C
2434
1735
1835
1935 WINDSOR C-9 C783511-9
2035 AKI B-9 B543987-9
2135
2235
2335
2435
1736 MELIOR D-5 D540466-7
1836 CALLIA E-6 E550852-6
1936
2036 ▲ ★ GLISTEN A-F A000986-F
2136
2236 TSARINA D-7 D420636-7
2336 ▲ ★ BENDOR A-C A756656-C
2436
1737 ★ EGYPT B-9 BAC6567-9
1837
1937 OVERNALE B-9 B55467A-9
2037
2137 SOREL E-2 E58569A-2
2237 ▲ HELL C-A C795300-A
2337
2437
1738
1838
1938 ★ NEW ROME B-B B837866-B
2038 TRANE C-B C639422-B
2138 ▲ HOROSHO C-A C4378A6-A
2238
2338
2438
1739 ASTER C-9 C86A410-9
1839
1939 CRAW C-5 C573645-5
2039
2139
2239
2339
2439
1740
1840
1940
2040
2140 ▲ ★ ROMAR B-8 B550456-8
2240
2340
2440

🪐	Gas Giant	🟩	Secure System		Asteroids (no atmosphere/water)
B-6	Starport Class & Tech Level	🟧	Amber Zone	●	Planet (dry)
★	Imperial Naval Base	▪▪▪▪	Imperial Worlds Border	●	Planet (water present)
▲	Imperial Scout Base	—	X-boat Route		

INCIDENTAL CHARACTERS

The Travellers will interact with a great many people over the course of this campaign. Many are little more than passing encounters; some relevant to the plot and most of them not. There is no need for characteristics and skills in most cases. Contacts and opponents are grouped according to where in the campaign they first appear, including some characters with whom the Travellers cannot interact. These people are no longer alive but their story may be important to unravelling the overall campaign plot.

The following incidental characters are not part of the campaign plot as written. They are included for the convenience of the Referee. If the Travellers want to know more about someone who passed on a rumour to them, or they antagonise people along the way, the Referee can assign identities as needed. Most are pretty ordinary, as might be expected from a random starport worker or starship crewmember. However, even 'unimportant' characters might have a story or unexpected connections, skills and ideas.

GIIALA LARKHEN (SPACER)

SPECIES	GENDER	AGE
Human	Female	35

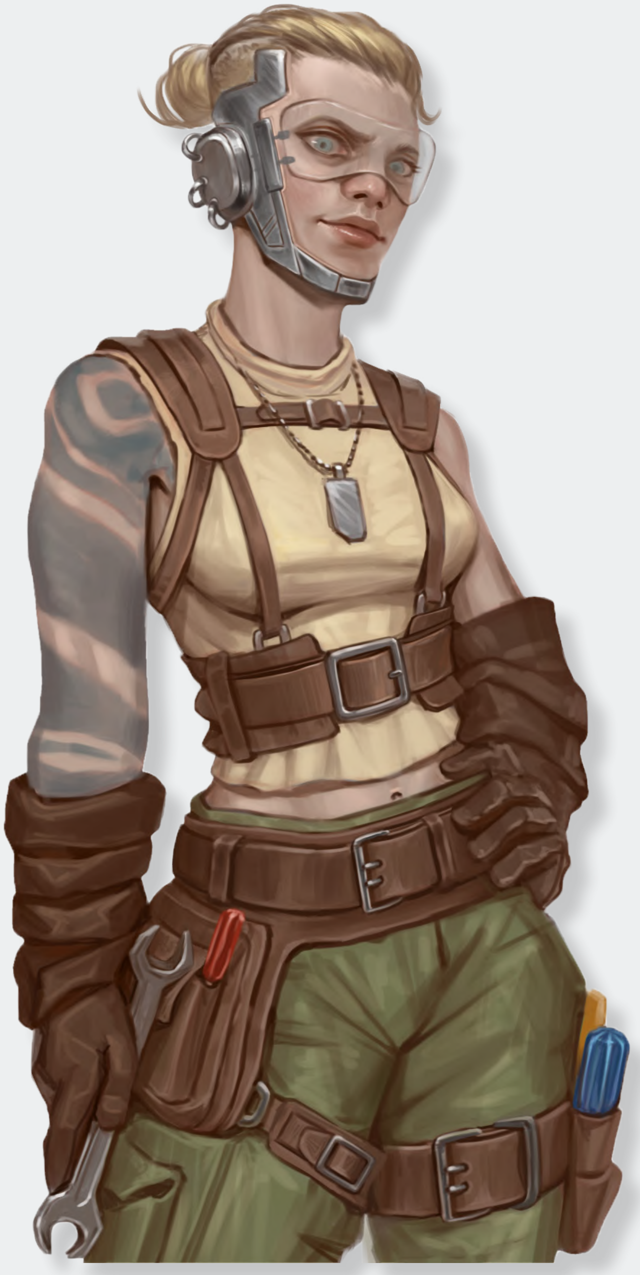
TRAITS			—	SKILLS
STR	7	INT	7	Admin 3, Electronics (sensors) 2, Gun Combat (slug) 1, Leadership 1, Steward 1, Vacc Suit 2
DEX	8	EDU	6	
END	6	SOC	5	

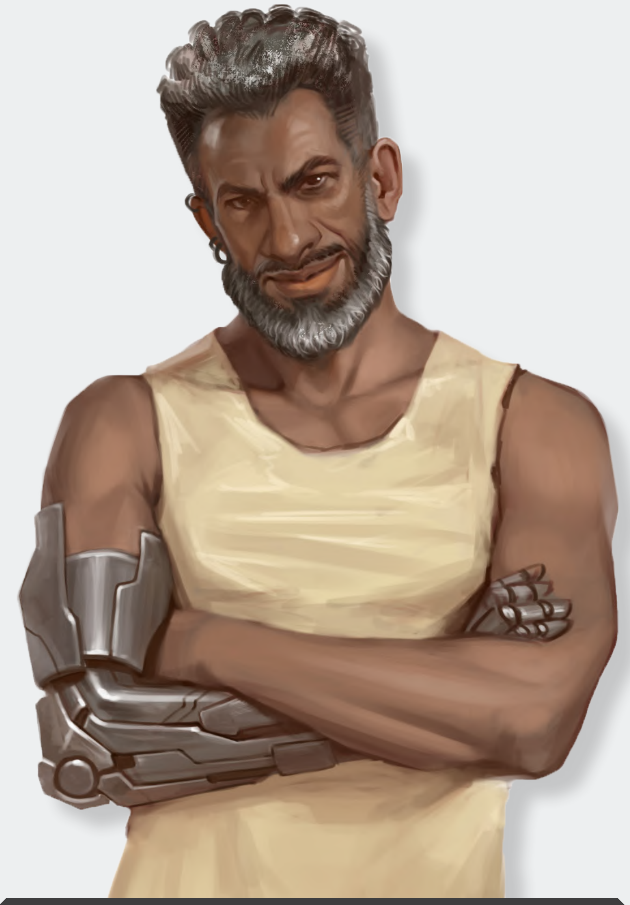
WEAPONS	Usually none
ARMOUR	Usually none
EQUIPMENT:	Tools and instruments connected with shipboard technical tasks

Giiala Larkhen has made a career out of filling out the roster of small starships. She can do a bit of engineering, carry out maintenance and look after passengers if necessary. She moves from vessel-to-vessel when the fancy takes her and has a wide but not very deep knowledge of the worlds in Glisten.

The following characters are subdivided according to their skills or area of expertise. This is of course subject to change if the Referee considers it desirable.

- **Spacers** are likely to be either ship crew or starport workers, or to have retired from such a career.
- **Associates** are likely to be sources of information or items unavailable through normal channels.
- **Citizens** are ordinary people, or seem to be.





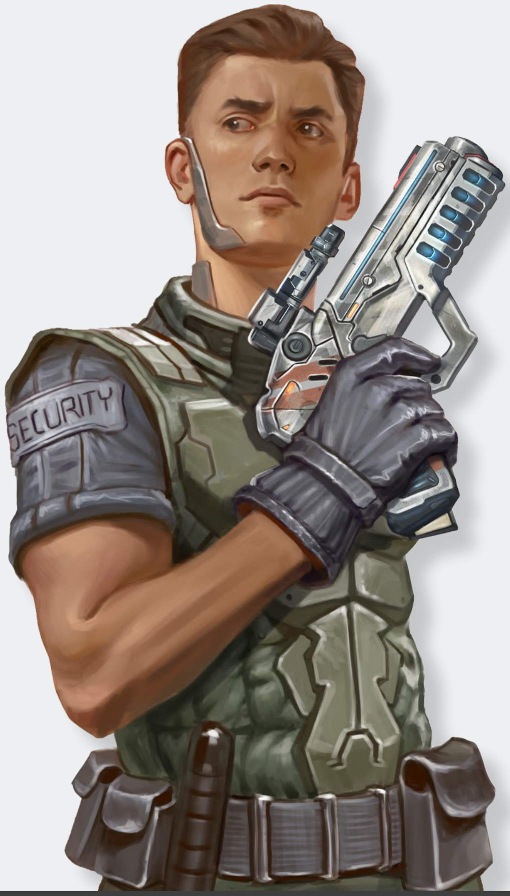
LUUDE PINROSAQU (SPACER)

SPECIES	GENDER	AGE
Human	Male	58

TRAITS			—	SKILLS
STR	5	INT	9	Admin 3, Electronics (sensors) 2, Gun Combat (slug) 1, Leadership 1, Steward 1, Vacc Suit
DEX	9	EDU	7	
END	4	SOC	8	

WEAPONS	Usually none
ARMOUR	Usually none
EQUIPMENT:	Usually none carried

Luude Pinrosaqu is a retired merchant crewmember. He came in through a common route; a four-year stint in the Imperial Navy followed by a move to a mid-level merchant line. He has no strong opinions about the Imperium or its navy; he served his time, learned useful skills and was treated well enough. After many years as a deck officer on a merchant ship, Luude retired to pursue his interests and hobbies. This might include something interesting or useful to the Travellers.



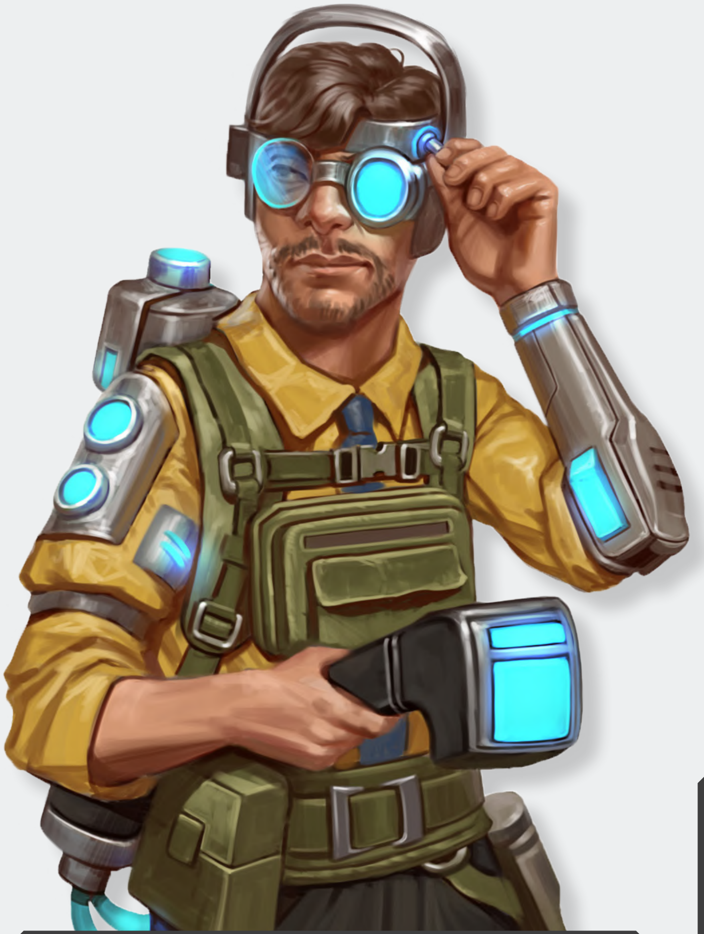
PIOTR AIKA (SPACER)

SPECIES	GENDER	AGE
Human	Male	32

TRAITS			—	SKILLS
STR	8	INT	7	Admin 2, Gun Combat (slug) 1, Melee (unarmed) 1
DEX	5	EDU	6	
END	9	SOC	6	

WEAPONS	Baton (2D) and Autopistol (3D-3) when necessary
ARMOUR	Usually none, Flak Jacket (+5) when needed
EQUIPMENT:	Security equipment when needed

Piotr Aika is a starport worker, serving as a security reservist when needed and otherwise carrying out administrative tasks. He ‘hears things’ in the course of his job and might know about ship movements, unusual cargoes or where to find people.



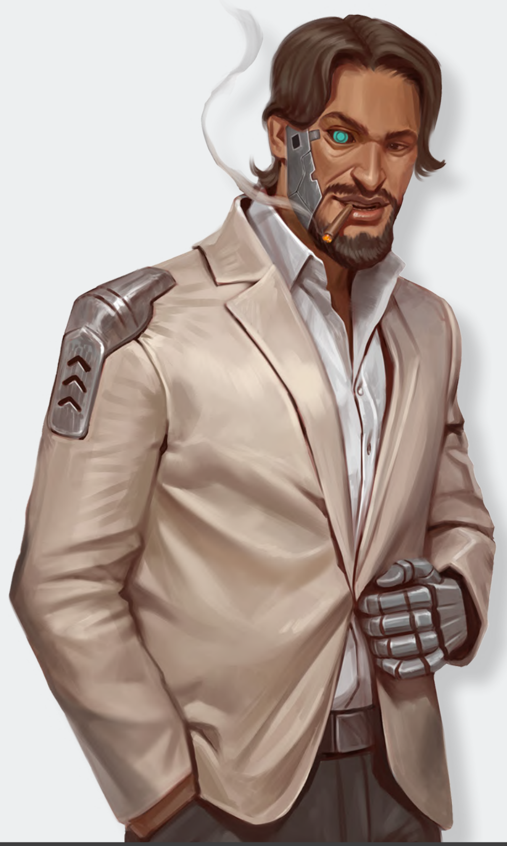
BOAC CLARK (ASSOCIATE)

SPECIES	GENDER	AGE
Human	Male	28

TRAITS			—	SKILLS
STR	5	INT	6	Profession (dull job) 3
DEX	6	EDU	8	
END	4	SOC	7	

EQUIPMENT:	Home-made ghost-hunting kit

Boac Clark has an unassuming job and is content to make a modest living. His interest is the paranormal. He is not an Ancients Hunter and indeed considers them deluded idiots. There were no 'Ancients' but the spirits of the dead and some supernatural creatures… those are real. In the course of his investigation into the paranormal he may have come across information useful to the Travellers. He might have interpreted it entirely incorrectly but the data could still be valid.



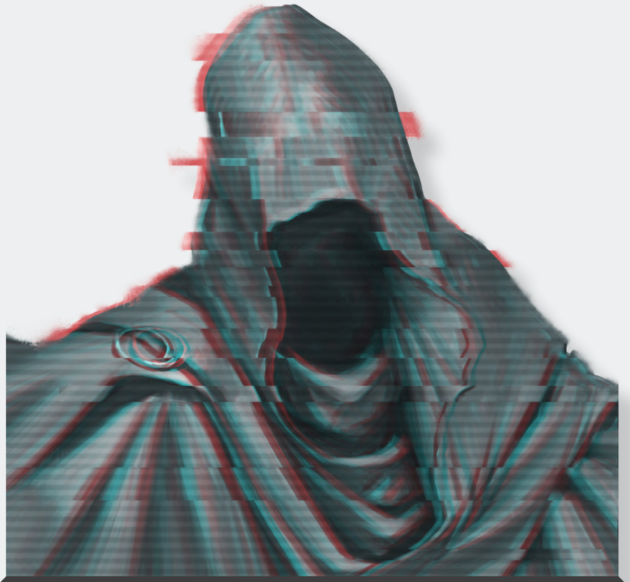
NGUYEN MOSTAFA (ASSOCIATE)

SPECIES	GENDER	AGE
Human	Male	42

TRAITS			—	SKILLS
STR	8	INT	5	Admin 4, Advocate 2, Broker 3
DEX	6	EDU	9	
END	7	SOC	8	

EQUIPMENT:	He can get almost anything he needs

Nguyen Mostafa has a small office and a couple of staff, operating in the commercial sector as a buyer for other concerns. His clients vary; one day he is helping a small supermarket chain negotiate deals for stock and the next he is working on a weapons import license for a mercenary unit. Everything he does is legitimate and mundane, unless you consider shipping jump drive components to Rhylanor particularly amazing. However, Nguygen is very well connected and sometimes assists with questionable projects. It is possible there are artefact smugglers or gun runners in his extensive client list, or that he can put the Travellers in touch with an expert on whatever they have found. All for a fee, of course.



THE COMMS MYSTIC (ASSOCIATE)

SPECIES	GENDER	AGE
—	—	—

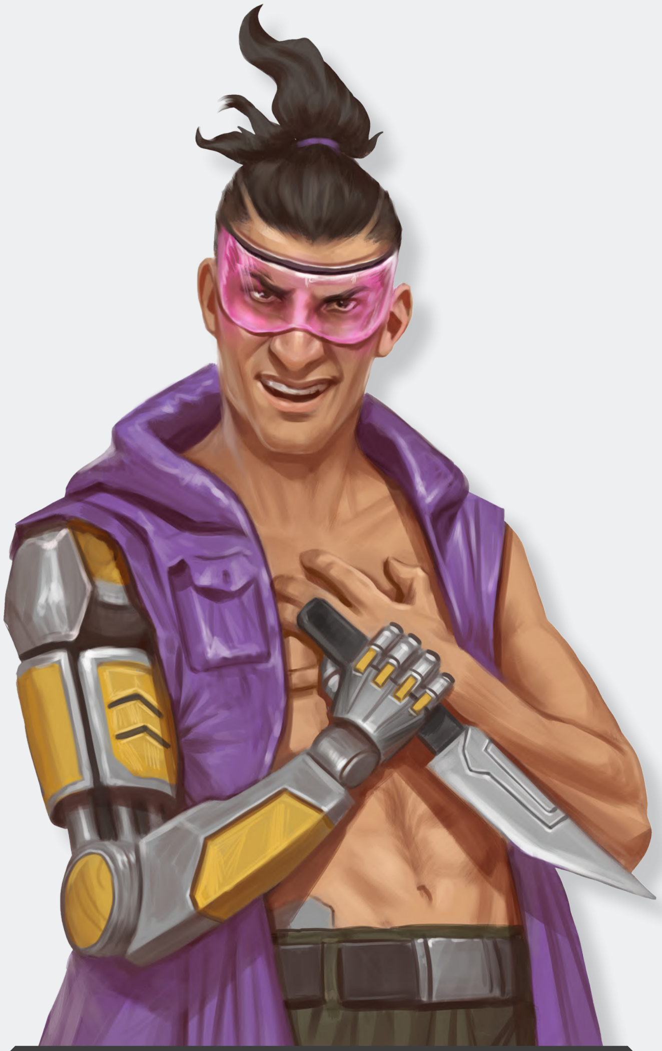
TRAITS			—
STR	?	**INT**	?
DEX	?	**EDU**	?
END	?	**SOC**	?

SKILLS

Skills unknown but presumably a high level of Electronics

WEAPONS:	?
ARMOUR:	?
EQUIPMENT:	?

The Comms Mystic undoubtedly has a name but nobody knows what it is. They never deal with anyone in person, instead using a holographic image of a hooded wizard-like figure over a secure and untraceable comms link. The Mystic is a communications and electronic security expert, who excels at getting information for those willing to pay for it. Jamming, disrupting and spoofing are also specialities. There are many rumours about the Comms Mystic. Among them is a claim that they are actually an artificial intelligence pretending to be a secretive person. A wilder version of this tale claims that the Mystic is in fact an Ancients device; a supercomputer or robotic system… or something… that has evolved sentience and sells its services to the highest bidder. It is also claimed that the Mystic has embedded code into various worlds' datanets allowing it to exist in several places at once and that the original may or may not ever be identified.



NICHOLAS ERMUGKISH (CITIZEN)

SPECIES	GENDER	AGE
Human	Male	24

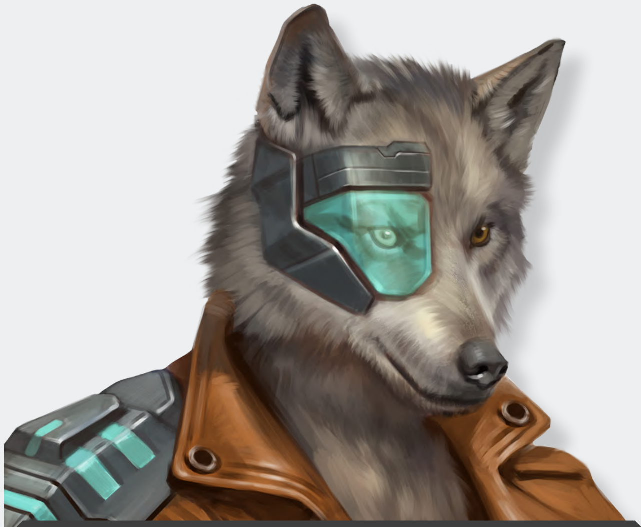
TRAITS			—
STR	6	**INT**	5
DEX	8	**EDU**	4
END	5	**SOC**	3

SKILLS

Melee (blade) 1, Stealth 1, Streetwise 3, other skills as necessary

WEAPONS:	Knife (1D+2)
EQUIPMENT:	Anything an ordinary person might have, plus perhaps some stolen items.

Nicholas Ermugkish is a denizen of the backstreets. Possibly a minor criminal or just a bit of a lowlife, this is someone who might know someone rather than a major plot element.



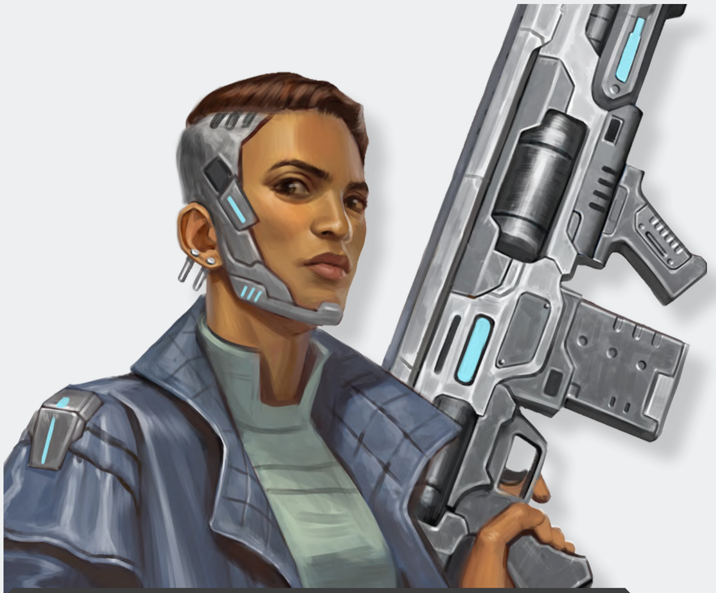
JAMES EPRAWYR (CITIZEN)

SPECIES	GENDER	AGE
Vargr	Male	26

TRAITS			—	SKILLS
STR	5	INT	8	Profession 2
DEX	7	EDU	6	
END	4	SOC	6	

EQUIPMENT: Appropriate to profession

James Eprawyr is a Vargr, who like many adopted a more pronounceable human name for daily use. In his case his home community had an unusual dialect which influenced his choice. Essentially he speaks Galanglic with a Vargr tongue and a Welsh accent. Other than that, he is a typical guy with a job who the Travellers might run into in their journeys.



STELLA DA SILVA (CITIZEN)

SPECIES	GENDER	AGE
—	Female	32

TRAITS			—	SKILLS
STR	7	INT	6	Gun Combat (slug) 2, Profession 2
DEX	6	EDU	9	
END	8	SOC	8	

WEAPONS: Advanced Combat Rifle (3D, Auto 3, Scope)

EQUIPMENT: Appropriate to profession

Stella Da Silva appears to be just another ordinary worker but like many she served a term in the armed forces to get the college benefits. Among her mustering out benefits was her service rifle, kept in good condition… just in case.

USING INCIDENTAL CHARACTERS

These incidental characters can be used to quickly give flavour to an encounter or create an identity for someone the Travellers interact with. For example, they are chasing a rumour about an Ancients expert who might be able to help them and end up on a world in District 268. This is not a planned part of the campaign but the expert turns out to be a useful contact. The Referee quickly assigns a name and identity from this list and notes where the expert is based.

On another occasion the Travellers are getting a bit meta-gamey, discounting anyone the Referee does not have a ready name for. An identity is assigned to the next Wannabee the Travellers consult with and since they have an identity the Travellers assume this is an essential plot point. The Referee then has fun trying to convince the Travellers that the Aliens were actually super-intelligent cuttlefish and finds the Travellers surprisingly willing to believe this nonsense… all because it comes from a named character.

A PACKAGE FROM SORREL

A Package from Sorrel is the 'hook' for the campaign, leading the Travellers into a search for a former contact and ultimately to the mysterious Twilight's Peak. The initial incident can take place almost anywhere but since investigating leads to Egypt in Glisten it will be helpful if the Travellers are in the vicinity.

Some, or perhaps all, of the Travellers have a friend or contact named Sorrel Tergaii. Ideally, she might be worked into an ongoing campaign before this point but the Referee should note that she is unlikely to survive the events of *Hell at Perihelion* and will be a very different person afterward if she does. Sorrel Tergaii has been on and off the Travellers' radar for some time, popping up in unexpected places then going dark again. The Travellers might suspect she is some kind of intelligence operative; she is certainly a competent and resourceful individual with a nose for anything interesting.

PLEASE SIGN FOR THIS

Shortly after the Travellers have finished their latest escapade, a courier arrives with a nondescript briefcase. His instructions are to deliver the case to the Travellers; he knows nothing more than that. The case is surprisingly heavy and attempts to scan it indicate the contents are typical of what a lawyer or broker might carry to work – flimsies from a printer, a couple of small repeater screens and their stands, even a box of paperclips. There is nothing suspicious about the case other than its weight… and the fact that it will not open.

Immediately after taking possession of the case the Travellers receive a comms message. It is text-only, containing a string of alphanumeric digits and the phrase 'figure it out, guys!'. Entering the code opens the case. Upon doing so the Travellers will immediately realise it is not what it seems. This is a 'Carter Case', manufactured by a small security firm based out of Ushra in the Dagudashaag sector. The origins of its nickname are unknown and the manufacturers use a far more formal designation. Possession of a case like this is subject to strict licensing in most jurisdictions as it can be used to smuggle dangerous items through starport security.

The first thing the Travellers notice upon opening the case is that there are no paperclips… but there is a gun. It is some kind of heavy revolver and is accompanied by a full box of 50 cartridges. These are obviously energy cartridges of a sort used to power some laser weapons. They are an unusual calibre, incompatible with most weapons but specific to the gun in the case. Someone has sent the Travellers a gun… how odd.

There is not much else, just a few small scientific sample cases and a handwritten note. Most of the cases contain carefully wrapped fragments of a strange alloy, clearly broken off something by using a great deal of force. The alloy glows faintly when some people touch it and becomes slightly warm for others. In one sample case is what can only be described as a jewel. Its facets catch the light in a way that makes it look green at first but turning it over slowly causes a shift through blue and red to a glimmering almost-black. Individuals see different shades and colours, with the shift occurring at differing speeds.

The package is accompanied by a cryptic handwritten note: 'The gun is just to get your attention and, well, you know. I think they found something and it's big. I need you to come get me and we'll slip some more of this stuff out when we leave. Look for a scout ship named *Garnette.* Her skipper is Bernadatta Khaled. She can tell you where I am. She'll want identification – tell her about that time we did that thing. Don't hang around; I'm getting scared. Sorrel.'

The tone of the note is right for Sorrel Tergaii and the situation she has made a point of not describing sounds like the sort of thing she gets involved in. Travellers who have met Sorrel will know exactly what 'that thing' was and why Sorrel is not openly referring to it – the Travellers or the Referee can make up a wild tale about some crazy exploit if they like. Referencing this should serve as a passcode when the Travellers find the *Garnette*, although there will be other issues at that point.

The Travellers might jump to the conclusion they have just been sent Ancients relics or something similar through the mail. This is correct and it raises a number of questions. How did Sorrel know where to address the package? Why was it not intercepted? Trade and transfer of Ancients items is restricted and packages are scanned at every port they move through. Most importantly, what is the jewel and why did Sorrel have it? If the Travellers want to know the answers they will have to seek out the *Garnette*.

HOW DID THE CASE REACH THE TRAVELLERS?

Sorrel Tergaii is not an intelligence agent and never was but she has a nose for mystery and trouble. Most of her career has been spent investigating on behalf of well-paying clients, usually boring stuff like corporate misfeasance. The money she has made allowed her to collect some pretty high-end equipment and set up a web of contacts. She has been keeping track of the Travellers for some time and had a good idea where to send the case in order to intercept them.

Sorrel has worked with the crew of *Garnette* on and off for some years and is friendly with them. Indeed, her present venture is a result of a mutual project. Sorrel has infiltrated an installation in the Caledonia system and found something rather worrying. If *Garnette* and her crew were to come to Sorrel's rescue, this would make it apparent she had discovered something connected with the Ancients. Sorrel would prefer it if nobody knew that just yet, so has tried to arrange for the Travellers to get her out instead. It was a reasonable plan but it has already gone awry as the Travellers will soon find out.

It is probable that the Travellers will want to investigate the items Sorrel has sent. It may not be possible to perform a complete analysis all at once but the Travellers can make an initial appraisal and come back to perform more detailed experimentation later. In the meantime the Travellers need to find Sorrel which means tracking down the *Garnette*. Movements of privately owned ships are not advertised but it is not hard to track a vessel by way of starport records. These are routinely shared between all major (Class A or B) starports. A simple data search indicates that *Garnette* has been in and out of Egypt's port several times in the past two years. More information may be available there.

ANALYSIS

Rules for finding a suitable source of information for the objects are found on page 20. If the Travellers attempt their own analysis, they will need at least a rudimentary lab if they want to do more than just poke at the objects. The analysis will take time and require steady work, perhaps whilst the Travellers' ship is in jumpspace. Each stage of the analysis must be completed before the next can begin.

The time required for each stage is in person-time; that is, if it takes six hours to complete that stage, then three people can do it in two hours providing they cooperate and share findings. Where a check difficulty is given, this is the difficulty of an Investigate check required to complete this stage. DMs may apply for having a laboratory available, such as one aboard a starship, whilst DM-4 applies if the Travellers have inadequate tools and sensors for the stage they are attempting.

The Travellers should specify the sort of things they are doing – spectrographic analysis, bashing with a brick, sending 40,000 volts through the item or whatever they feel like attempting. A Traveller with a Science skill may use this as a DM whist carrying out a relevant investigation. The Referee should be sensible about the amount of time the Travellers can put in. Claims that a Traveller does nothing but analyse the jewel for a fortnight should be disallowed. However interesting the item may be, people need downtime and can become distracted.

The Travellers could improvise a basic lab with a bit of effort and a few instruments bought at a TL10+ world. A starship's laboratory counts as 'properly equipped' and it may be possible to gain access to other labs, such as a specialist materials facility, if the Traveller have the right connections. Once a stage has been completed the Travellers will know all the relevant information but still might not understand why the object behaves as it does.

If the Travellers can find a relevant expert, they may be able to simply tell the Travellers what they need, although this is unlikely. It is more probable that the expert will have general information which can be translated into a positive DM on analysis.

Stages of Analysis

Stage	Time	Check Difficulty	Notes
Inspection	2D minutes	Easy (4+)	Simple inspection, prodding, testing hardness with various objects. No tools required.
Preliminary Analysis	2Dx30 minutes	Routine (6+)	Typically scans with common sensors, measurements of temperature change, precise measurement of size and mass, calculations of related characteristics such as density. Basic instruments required.
Detailed Analysis	2D Hours	Average (8+)	A detailed laboratory analysis which should indicate most properties and why they exist. Some kind of basic laboratory is necessary to avoid a negative DM.
Full Analysis	2Dx5 Hours	Average (8+)	The object is subjected to every test the Travellers can think of and obscure scientific manuals are consulted to find more. Results are cross-referenced with known data and phenomena. A properly equipped laboratory is needed to avoid a negative DM.
Follow-Up Analysis	2Dx2D Hours	Difficult (10+)	The Travellers try to find out something specific about the object. This can take a variable amount of time. A properly equipped laboratory is needed to avoid a negative DM.

THE ALLOY FRAGMENTS

The alloy fragments range in size from chips to segments up to eight centimetres long. All are ragged about the edges, having been bashed as much as cut free from wherever they were found.

Stage	Knowledge
Inspection	The material is light silvery-grey and appears to be a honeycomb structure. Despite this it is unusually heavy. The alloy becomes warm or glows when some people touch it and will react the same way each time to that person.
Preliminary Analysis	The material is fantastically strong and may be some kind of superdense alloy. It conducts electricity and has a very high heat capacity. Even a small piece can be heated with a blowtorch or similar for an extended period without significantly increasing in temperature. An hour with a blowtorch is required to produce any measurable increase. It will retain this heat for an extremely long period, cooling at a predictable rate. The same applies when the alloy is cooled.
Detailed Analysis	The composition is extremely exotic and matches samples found at various Ancients sites. When subjected to certain voltages and frequencies the properties of the material change. It is not possible to predict the effects at this stage.
Full Analysis	The material is designed to be malleable using electrical pulses in various combinations of rhythm, amplitude and frequency. It can be made soft enough to bend in the hands, or to extend to multiple times its own length. It seems likely this was a building material or used in starship construction, allowing the hull and interior to be reshaped at will.
Follow-Up Analysis	Nailing down the exact combination to produce any given result requires a follow-up analysis.

THE JEWEL

The jewel is multifaceted and about 2.3 centimetres in diameter. It is 0.7 centimetres thick and changes colour when held up to the light.

Stage	Knowledge
Inspection	The jewel is multifaceted and extremely hard.
Preliminary Analysis	The jewel is composed of a variety of exotic materials in a matrix of carbon. Its composition cannot possibly be natural in origin. It reacts 'weirdly' to electromagnetic stimuli, either glowing or becoming warm. Magnets become less effective close to the jewel and if left there will gradually become hot enough to melt.
Detailed Analysis	The jewel is some kind of 'radiation sink'. See text for details.
Full Analysis	No additional information is available at this time.
Follow-Up Analysis	No additional information is available at this time.

The jewel is, in fact, an Ancients artefact. Its function may be much wider than the Travellers are able to figure out in this adventure but what they will encounter is highly useful. The jewel is, in effect, a radiation sink. It soaks up ionising radiation of sufficient intensity to be harmful and stores it, although the capacity of the jewel is limited. The jewel exerts its effect in a roughly two metres sphere and will protect a person and their equipment from harmful radiation as well as electromagnetic interference. Someone in possession of one of these jewels can be considered to have Protection +2D (determined randomly upon each attack) against energy weapons such as lasers.

The jewel's function cannot initially be controlled by the Travellers. It requires a psionic mind with specialist training, so even psions among the Travellers will not be able to control it at this stage. The Travellers might be able to learn how to use the jewel and others like it but in the meantime, they can be used to operate some Ancients systems.

One problem with continued exposure to the jewels is their effects on a person's mental state. They are likely to become obsessed with staring at or meditating upon the jewel, feeling a revelation or truth – or perhaps the ability to control something – is just out of their reach. Any Traveller in possession of a jewel must make a Very Difficult (12+) INT check every 2D days. The Referee should not tell the Traveller what the check is for but give them the impression something is waiting to be unlocked. This should convince the Traveller to hang onto the jewel when a prudent nature might make them want rid of it.

Once the check is made, the Traveller's subconscious becomes connected to the jewel. Without training they still cannot use it but are now more affected by its influence. The Traveller will start to have strange dreams and develop an inclination to attribute mystical properties to quite normal events. This is subtle at first but could become debilitating. It will be obvious to others the Traveller is being affected but to them the sensation is different. They will be convinced they are on the brink of unlocking some great power or truth. In fact they are but it will take a while before they learn anything useful.

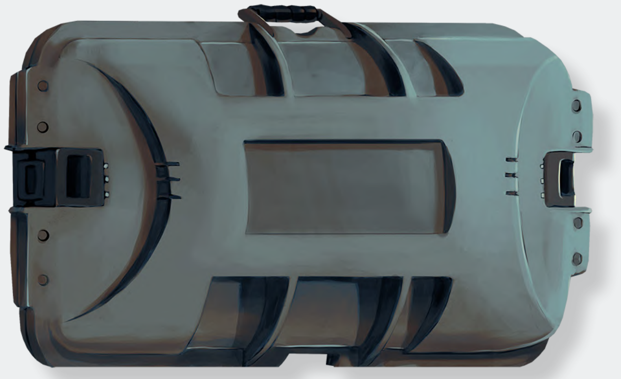
A normal human or equivalent mind would eventually be destroyed by this process but the events of *Mysteries of the Ancients* will provide the Travellers with a way to avoid this fate.

KIGIRLUR, LIC ENHANCED SECURITY CASE

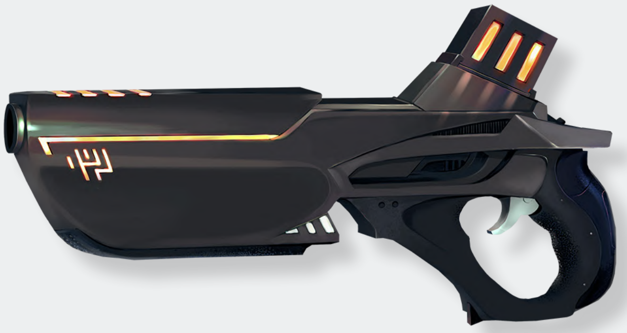
A 'Carter Case' is designed to allow sensitive objects to be smuggled through secured areas, albeit at very high cost. A case can be made to look like a high-end attaché case or a beat-up old briefcase, as requested when ordered. Variants are available in the form of a flexible bag, although these do not provide the same level of concealment as the hard version. Manufactured at TL15 by Kigirlur LIC, the case is designed to fulfil a range of security functions. It is lightly armoured, providing Protection +4 to anyone hiding behind it. If the case is opened out fully – which will cause unsecured items to fall on the ground – it can serve as a shield. Left closed, it provides Protection+8 but damage in excess of four points will penetrate and damage the contents.

Protection is not the main function of a Carter Case, however. It can be programmed to return a variety of innocuous readings and images when scanned. This is not perfect, especially if the default settings are used; by default the case creates an image built up of standard elements arranged in various ways, which can sometimes be recognised by systems set to look for known patterns. Users who customise their cases by integrating elements from outside the standard set are more likely to beat a sensor system.

To successfully convince a sensor unit that it is seeing only harmless objects the user needs to make an Average (8+) straight check with DM+1 for every Tech Level below 15 the sensor equipment was produced at. An additional DM equal to the Effect of an Electronics (sensors) check when the case was set up and personalised may also be applied. The process used is complex and not infallible but success means the contents will not be recognised as harmful by a standard screening process.



Item	TL	Kg	Cost
Carter Case	15	1	MCr1



A Carter Case will defeat most routine sensor-only screening systems but it is up to the user to ensure security operatives do not look inside. In places where baggage is only scanned there is no problem but where at least some bags are opened the Traveller must find a way to avoid this. Typically a Difficult (10+) Deception check is required but clever Travellers will improve the odds by arriving at a time when there are a lot of distractions or staff are very short-handed, or by some entirely different means. A combination of Carter Case and diplomatic passport can get almost anything into a secured area. However, the case can only hold so much; a little less than a standard attaché case in fact.

LITEBEAM 6L HEAVY LASER PISTOL

LiteBeam, LIC started out as a specialist energy weapons manufacturer, which has since branched out into optical instruments, communications lasers and starship-grade weapons. Its core business remains as always the production of workhorse laser weaponry. The 6L is unusual, in that it is a specialist/prestige product produced for a limited market. It is a cartridge laser, powered by one-use high-energy cartridges rather than the usual battery or direct feed.

The 6L is built in the form of a bulky revolver, using a top-break action to make reloading easier when wearing gloves. As such it is marketed as a self-defence weapon for use in a vacc suit but is more commonly carried as a status symbol by people who have employees to do any actual fighting. Cartridges become very hot when fired, making handling them hazardous for a few minutes unless insulating gloves are used. Even if the spent ammunition is flung out of the gun by a vigorous pull-down on the barrel, reloading is not quick. It is, at least according to the manufacturer, worth it.

The LiteBeam 6L delivers a more potent pulse than most laser pistols, although its effective range is short. The weapon and its associated ammunition are expensive and can be hard to source in some areas but on the other hand it is silent and hits hard and looks great doing it.

Weapon	TL	Range	Damage	Kg	Cost	Capacity	Ammunition Cost (box of 50 rounds)	Traits
LiteBeam 6L Heavy Laser Pistol	13	35	4D+1	1.1	Cr15000	6	Cr200	Zero-G

ANCIENTS HUNTERS

Ancients Hunters takes place in the Egypt system of the Glisten subsector. As always, it could be relocated to some other system if the Referee finds this desirable. Other people may know where *Garnette* is or has been operating, so even if the Travellers miss the clues here they may pick up on others later.

EGYPT

Egypt is a forbidding and dangerous world in the Glisten subsector, with an insidious atmosphere capable of penetrating most normal survival equipment. It is sufficiently hazardous that the Scout Service uses the surface for hostile-environment exercises. As with all the places the Travellers visit, they may find adventures or useful information on Egypt and are free to wander around as they please. For this reason the data for the mainworld is presented here but the Travellers can easily complete their business at the highport.

The Egypt system has a naval base, which is home to elements of the 100th fleet. These vessels are assigned to patrol the systems closest to the border and spend a lot of their time performing spaceworthiness and customs checks on vessels entering or re-entering Imperial space. Most of these ships are small, in the corvette class, or of obsolescent design. They have little value in a warfighting scenario but are entirely sufficient for their assigned role.

Other vessels from the 100th Fleet are based at Mille Falcs, one parsec away but in District 268. This subsector has no assigned fleet as it contains only three Imperial systems. Instead, a force of destroyers and corvettes patrols those systems and operates across the subsector in neutral space. These are the newest and best vessels in the 100th Fleet, other than a few assigned to the subsector admiral's flag squadron. Typically a destroyer or two would be considered sufficient to police the route to the Five Sisters and when necessary elements of the sector fleet can be detached to assist.

Egypt
UWP: BAC6567-9

Starport	B	Good
Size	A	16,000km
Atmosphere	C	Insidious
Hydrosphere	6	60%
Population	5	Hundreds of thousands
Government Type	6	Captive government/colony
Law Level	7	Shotguns prohibited
Technology Level	9	Anti-gravity

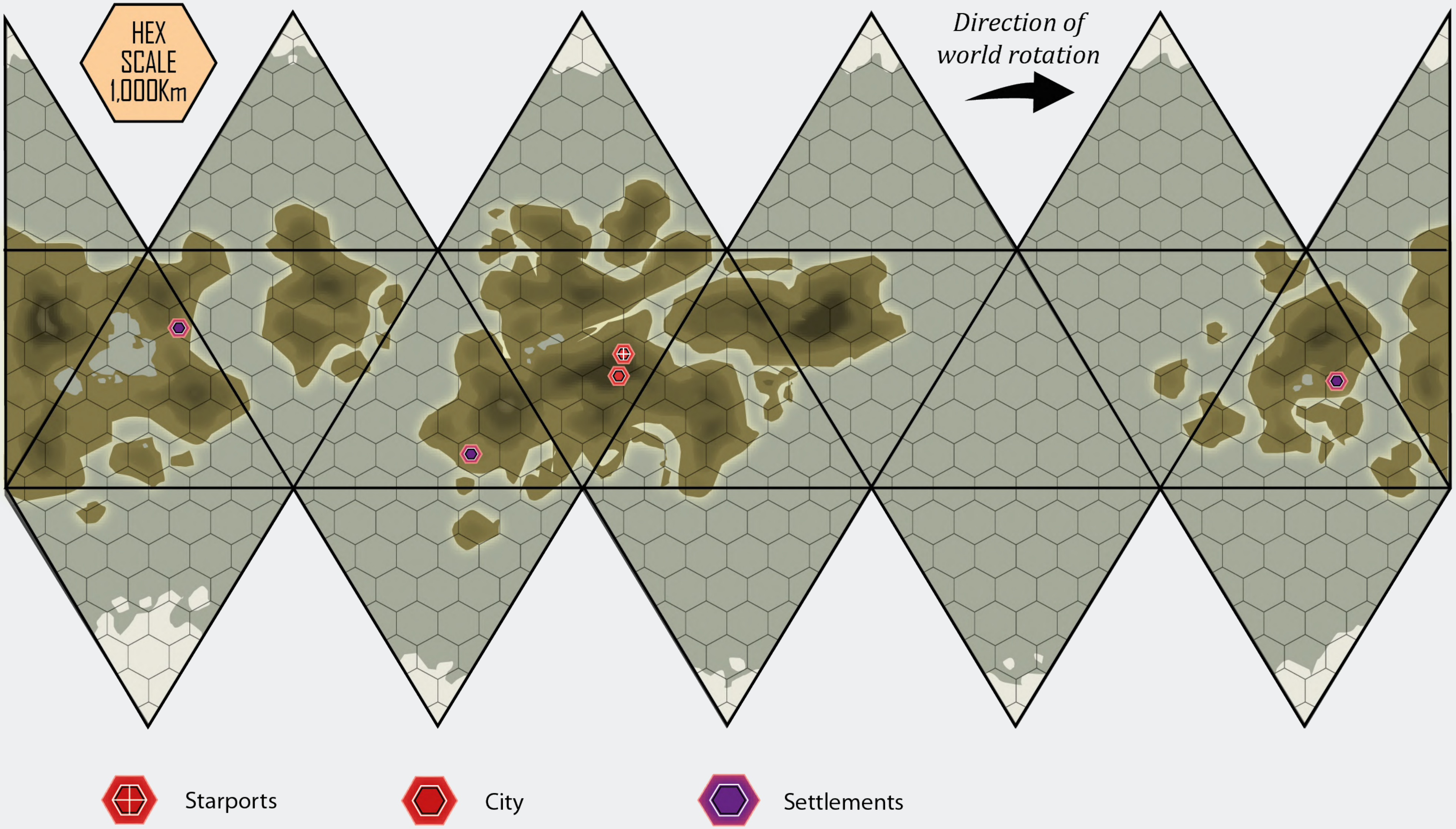
EGYPT HIGHPORT

Egypt's highport is large and of good quality. Its extensive commercial docks handle large freighters, with a small-ship berthing area elsewhere. There is also a dedicated passenger terminal for upmarket vessels and a section owned by the Scout Service which is used to support the x-boat and courier network. The system's naval base is located elsewhere in the system but there are always naval personnel enjoying liberty time in the port and there is usually at least one cruiser-sized system defence vessel within range. This is more about deterrence than defence. As a port of entry into Imperial space, it is useful to remind new arrivals of the power of the Imperial Navy. These vessels are home-ported at the naval base and commanded from there.

There is usually a fair amount of traffic around the port but its controllers are efficient and logjams are rare. When they do happen, it is usually because a vessel ignored instructions. The authorities are not tolerant of this behaviour and will usually dispatch a couple of fighters to escort the offender to a special docking area. There, the ship will be held until a fine is paid. Fines are not much in spacecraft-operator terms, typically Cr10000 for a minor infraction and more for flagrant disregard for the traffic controllers' authority. However, the process of paying a fine is deliberately (and notoriously) drawn-out, often taking several days during which a ship is likely to be losing money. Most ship operators find it best to obey instructions and refrain from hot-dogging.

EGYPT

UWP: BAC6567-9


HEX
SCALE
1,000Km
Direction of
world rotation
Starports
City
Settlements

Like most highports, there is a main concourse close to the small-ship docks and an upmarket version accessed from the passenger terminal. Internal transportation is good and most visitors do not really know where anything is – other than which internal transit system to hop on in order to get there. The port has the usual selection of bars, restaurants and entertainment facilities, all overpriced as is the way of starports. Those willing to take a little time to learn their way around can usually find something better, more interesting or cheaper.

ACTIVITIES AT THE HIGHPORT

The Travellers have come to Egypt to locate the *Garnette*. This does not mean they cannot indulge themselves in other activities as they pass through. There are the usual shops and bars, with a general Law Level 3 applying to items available for sale. Some items which are not legal to carry on the station can be bought as cargo, subject to the usual red tape and bureaucratic hassles. If the Travellers have experience of shipping cargo and decent administrative skills – and the right licenses – these can usually be minimised.

Egypt is very close to the Imperial border, making it a port of entry for ships coming in from District 268. These might pass through an Imperial system or two along the way but typically Egypt is where inspections and trading licenses are handled, so at any time there may be crews waiting whilst their spaceworthiness inspection is completed, or haranguing port officials to speed up paperwork. This adds a little exotic colour to what is otherwise a very typical corporate-run starport.

The Travellers may well find Egypt a little bland, with big brands and generic entertainment dominating the marketplace. One thing that might strike them as out of the ordinary is the presence of an Ancients Museum at the downport. It is, according to the advertising, entirely legitimate, fully licensed and run by the greatest expert in the Marches.

JUST STANDING THERE

As the Travellers disembark or return to their ship they spot a group of Droyne just… looking at it. This is not that uncommon; people do look at starships from time-to-time. However, there is an unnatural stillness about them which is a little unsettling. After a long moment they all simultaneously turn and walk away, their movements perfectly synchronised. Again, this is not all that uncommon for Droyne but it seems weird to outsiders.

The party consists of either Otshayyuk (Yusote's deputy) or Diusk (the emissary), plus a couple of Workers and a Warrior. These characters are detailed on page 156, along with the rest of their group. They are unlikely to be in armour unless the dockside is particularly lawless that day. If the Travellers do nothing, the group will move away and go about their business, and catching up will be tricky across a crowded starport concourse or other complex area. Even if they do catch up, the Droyne are likely to simply ignore the Travellers. If Diusk is present he may stop and listen to what they have to say but unless he thinks there is need for communication he will turn away without answering. Any experienced Traveller will know this sort of thing is normal for Droyne.

This encounter should take place somewhere the Travellers will face consequences if they attack the Droyne, although if they do Yusote will simply find more crewmembers at the next community he visits. An attack will turn Yusote hostile; otherwise he is not very interested in the Travellers at this time. Grabbing any of the Droyne will result in a wordless attempt by the attending Warrior to pull the Traveller away and a psionic distress call to the ship. Sooner or later Warriors will arrive. If the Travellers can be dissuaded simply by levelling plasma guns the Droyne will do this but they are quite willing to blast anyone to ash if they interfere. Psionic assault might also be used to disable someone impeding their progress – hopefully without triggering escalation.

If the Travellers are not stupid or violent, the incident will pass as merely puzzling. They may be frustrated at not knowing what just happened but this is just a fact of life sometimes. It could be that a group of people who happened to be Droyne just spotted something interesting about their ship and spent a few moments looking. Subsequent events will prove that there is more to it than that, however.

TRACKING THE GARNETTE

Garnette can be tracked by way of the local starport records office. Ships using the port are required to file a flight plan when leaving and to state where they have come from when they arrive. It is possible to falsify either or both, although there are serious penalties for doing so. This information is not normally available to the general public as many merchant ship operators prefer to keep their routes and sources secret; whilst the presence of a ship is public record, putting together a picture of where it has called can require visiting several ports. Passenger ships usually publicise their destination; others do not.

The Travellers can find out with a simple data search that *Garnette* has been at Egypt several times in the past couple of years but learning more requires consulting data held elsewhere or somehow gaining access to the non-public part of the records. Hacking the starport ship database is a possibility but it is heavily secured and penalties are stiff since it is typically pirates who want to know where ships are headed. There are, however, alternatives.

HACKING OR SOCIAL ENGINEERING

Getting access to a starport records computer is no simple business and carries stiff penalties if the intruders are caught – which they are likely to be. A direct 'sit down at a terminal and hack in' attempt is likely to both fail and result in capture but there are alternatives. Any secure system has flaws and those flaws are typically the people who use it. Egypt's records system is no exception.

The Travellers could take an oblique approach, researching the type of system and its security – or perhaps they already know because they have worked on or attacked similar systems before. Some research will indicate that the system is standard and has been in service a long time. This usually means personnel have workarounds and simplifications in place to make their lives easier. It would be possible to learn about these with a little social engineering – making friends with a portside operator or participating in an online discussion about how awful the records system is to use. This might give an insight into procedures to bypass upper layers of security and give access to shipping records. It is likely that some of the portside brokers have been given such access. This is illegal but quite common in a long-term business environment.

None of this can be accomplished with a single check. The Travellers will need to identify the right people then get them talking, which requires a good plan and the use of skills such as Carouse or Persuade, or possibly a lengthy jargon-session using Electronics skill. If the Travellers seem casual enough their victim might not even realise they have given access to the records to some random guys they just met.

ASKING

The Travellers might try just asking around. *Garnette* is a scout/courier, privately owned and therefore not tracked by the Scout Service nor particularly noteworthy to most people. On the other hand, her name is associated with Ancients Hunter exploits so it is probable that someone remembers her being in port. A successful Average (8+) Streetwise check will lead the Travellers to the sort of establishment *Garnette's* crew frequented or someone who worked on the ship whilst it was in port. The people involved are likely to be Wannabee Ancients Hunters of some sort, which the Travellers may find tiresome. Again, this will require a bit of roleplaying and maybe a Carouse check or similar.

DETECTIVE WORK

There are other ways to track a starship. If the Travellers invest time they can piece together *Garnette's* movements from several sources including its duration away from Egypt, fuel purchased, supplies and spares bought, odd comments made by port workers and passing crews. However they do it, the Travellers will learn that *Garnette* has made multiple visits to Egypt, usually at intervals of four to six weeks. Most were only of a few days' duration but a few months ago the ship was in port for several weeks. It is noted as having received repairs and a refit during this time. If the Travellers find someone who was involved, they can attest that the ship underwent more than a typical refit, with some kind of specialised low berth arrangement installed in its cargo hold.

Whether or not the Travellers obtain this information, they will be able to find out that *Garnette* filed a flight plan for Callia before leaving Egypt on the latest occasion – just three days ago. There is no indication of what she was doing, as small vessels of the type are not required to register anything beyond 'private business' or the existence of a charter. Personnel from the ship appear to have taken shuttles planetside on numerous occasions.

ANCIENTS HUNTERS AT EGYPT

It is possible the Travellers might just find out where *Garnette* is likely to be and go straight there but there is more information to be obtained at Egypt if they make the effort. The starport is probably not a great place to go asking around about Ancients experts; the Imperial authorities are well-represented due to the naval base. Asking questions about the Ancients is not officially discouraged but it seems highly unlikely that anyone who really knew anything would be in such an exposed location.

The mainworld is another matter entirely. It is a backwater, of no real interest other than as a gravitational anchor point for the port. It is a matter of public knowledge that in recent years Egypt has become something of a centre for the Ancients Hunter community. Most of those involved have little money but planetside property is extremely cheap. Travellers asking around or simply consulting a directory may be surprised to find that the downport has a Museum of the Ancients listed among its attractions. Most people will roll their eyes if anyone mentions it but the museum does bring in enough to afford the rent on a not-very-prominent commercial lot.

EGYPT DOWNPORT

Egypt is officially designated an Imperial colony, a rather archaic description sometimes still used for directly administered territories. Almost all of its half-million inhabitants live in the downport and associated startown, which is simply known as 'Egypt' by its inhabitants. This is reasonable enough; the rest of the planet is totally inhospitable and uninhabited, so effectively the port *is* Egypt.

Egypt has a modest chemicals extraction and purification industry which brings in a little revenue and employs a significant proportion of the population either directly or in supporting industries. The port governor is a civilian appointed from the Imperial bureaucracy along with a modest staff but most of the downport's security needs are provided by naval personnel on secondment. This arose out of a long-ago temporary arrangement that has never been replaced with anything better or more permanent. Laws are strict and vigorously enforced, particularly those relating to the integrity of the sealed city and the life support machinery necessary for survival.

Few non-local ships land at the port, which is served by a handful of large and small transports, and shuttles from the highport. These are sealed against the insidious atmosphere and regularly maintained. If the Travellers want to take their own ship they will not be prevented from landing, although the approach will trigger a barrage of recommendations for inspections and repairs. Most of these are nothing more than advisories but some are essentially adverts for services masquerading as official requirements. If the Travellers are duped into thinking they have to pay Cr25000 for a mandatory recommended precautionary inspection, so be it.

All vessels landing at the port go through the same process. Landing is made on a movable platform which is then drawn into one of the hangars. Once the hangar is sealed, a neutral-gas atmosphere is pumped in. This is mostly nitrogen and cannot support respiration. A thorough hosing with decontaminant follows. Once the process is completed a disembarkation tube is extended to the ship's airlock. Personnel can finally leave the vessel in safety and comfort. Cargo handling is usually done by robots, removing the need to keep pumping oxygen into a hangar where it will become tainted by traces of external atmosphere. Whilst cumbersome, this process keeps waste to a minimum.

The upshot of this process is that the Travellers will have to cool their heels for a few minutes before disembarking. If they came from the highport aboard a commercial flight they do not need to pass through customs. Otherwise the usual checks take place and the Travellers will have to explain any contraband they are carrying. If the Travellers are using the Carter Case to move items through a restricted area it will be scanned as normal but not physically searched unless the Travellers draw attention by being nervous or otherwise out of place. The case is designed to defeat exactly this sort of scan.

Nobody really cares why the Travellers have come to Egypt. The usual questions are asked but unless the answers are provocative or the Travellers somehow talk their way into trouble, they will be passed without comment. Egypt is not an important place and has little trouble other than bored workers drinking too much. Even stating they have come to see the Ancients museum will not attract attention.

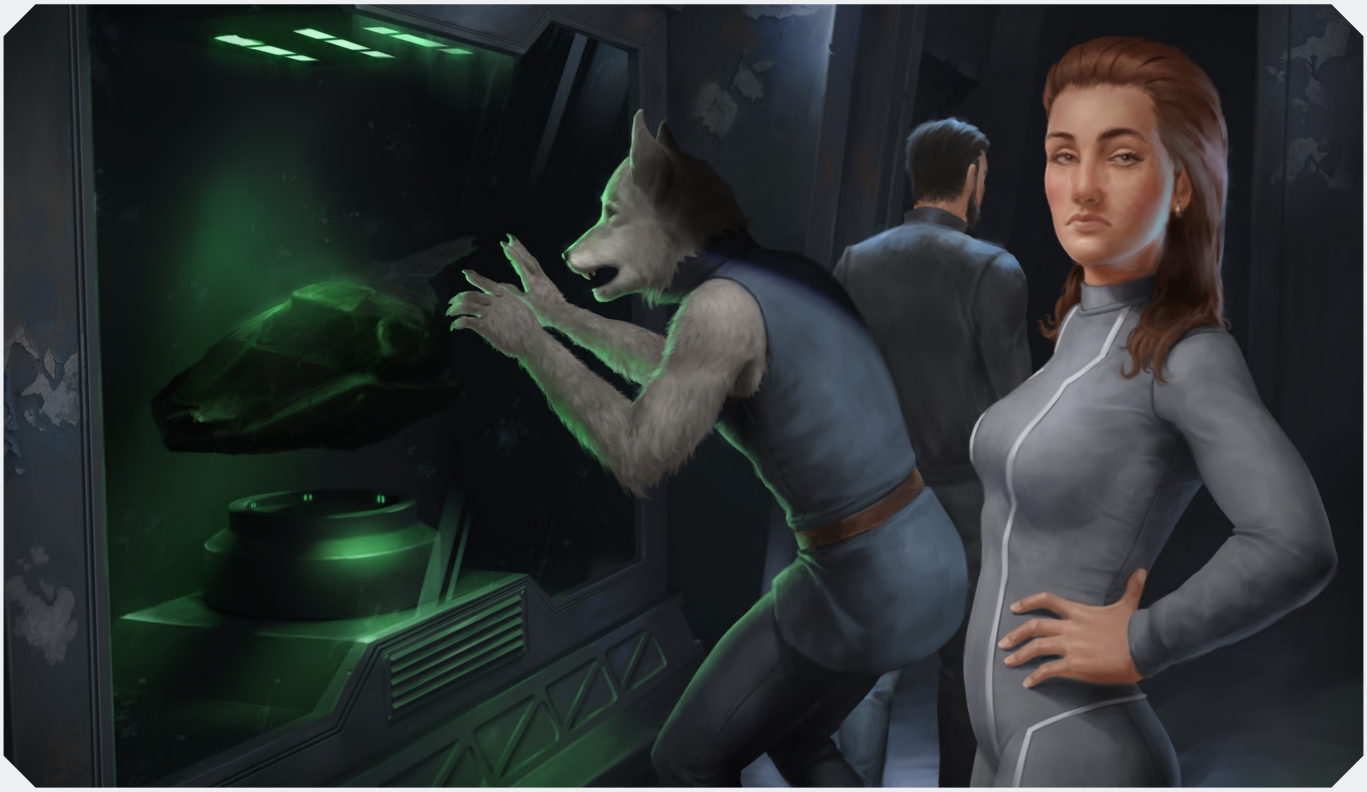
THE MUSEUM OF THE ANCIENTS

The museum is located among several other recreational establishments, most of them low-to-middle quality bars and restaurants. It is easy enough to find, due to the garish holographic signs floating above it. The museum takes up a typical retail plot and apparently is constructed as a silver dome. In fact this is just a façade created out of cheap reflective alloy. Entry is through a rather forbidding dark tunnel of the same material. This leads to a set of imposing doors, beyond which is the museum itself.

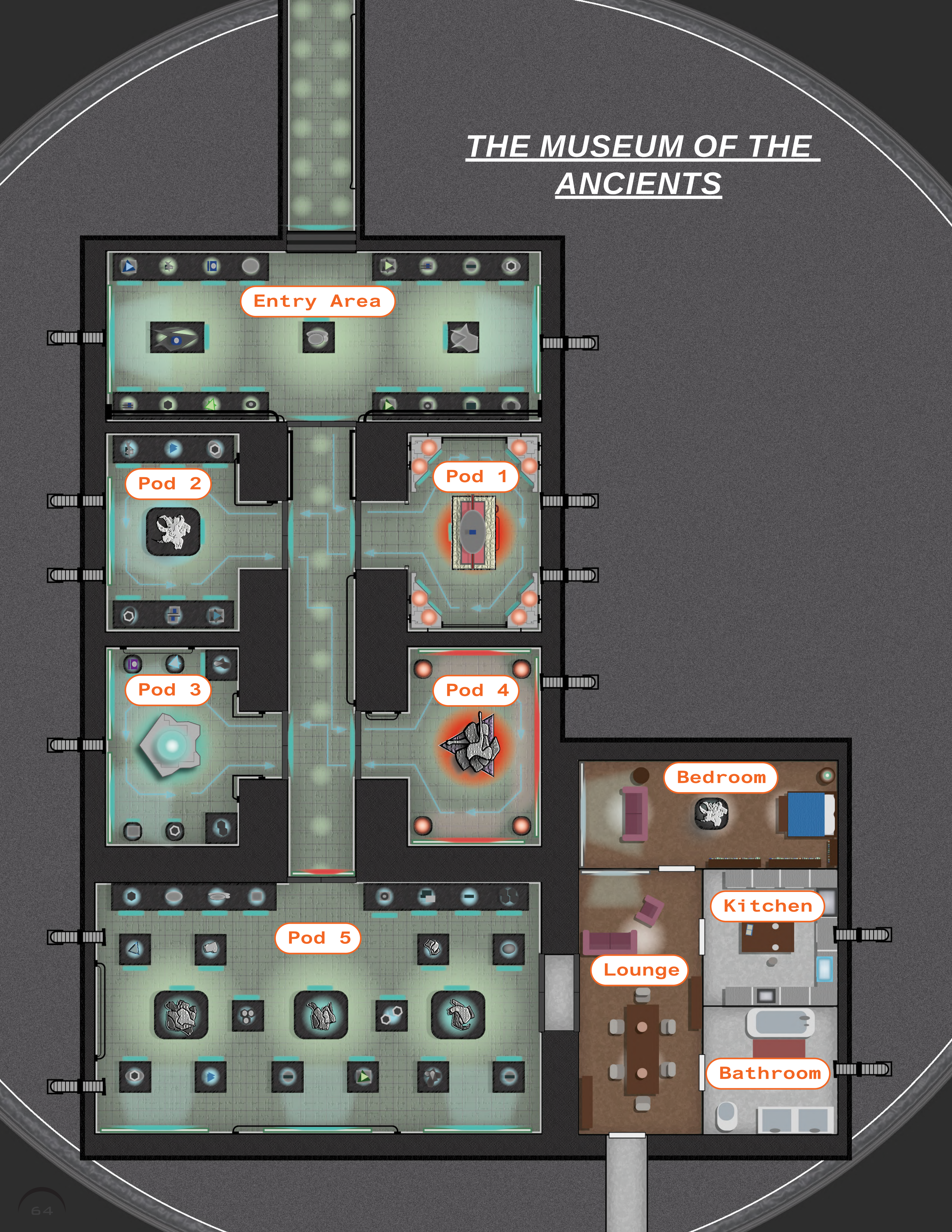
The actual structure of the museum is rather basic, using six prefabricated shelter/dwelling units connected by a long corridor. This is not apparent from the inside, where a great deal of effort has been expended on making visitors think they are in some kind of alien structure. Banging on a wall dispels this illusion quite quickly, however. The museum appears to be arranged as an entry area and four 'pods', each with a different theme. At the far end of the corridor is a heavy door with multiple '*PRIVATE: NO ADMITTANCE*' signs plastered on it. This is locked, and gives access to Pod 5 where 'the good stuff' is stored, and from there to the owner's residence, these structures are of the same construction as the rest of the museum, and there are no windows anywhere. The area under the dome not used by the buildings is bare and rather depressing.

A sign on the entry doors proclaims that the museum is curated by one Aish Nirkha, who is also known by his datanet persona as the Captain of Knowledge. Entry is a mere Cr10, getting a pass valid for a standard year. An automated ticket dispenser will provide the Travellers with an over-large and rather garish pseudo-paper ticket in the 'traditional style of Old Terra' and update their comms with the electronic version. The Travellers will not encounter Aish immediately but will be able to peruse the extensive collection for a while first. They will be disappointed; there are a few Ancients artefacts on display but they are the sort that can be bought as souvenirs at the gift shop when leaving any open-to-the-public site. Most of those are replicas anyway.

There is absolutely nothing of any importance on display and most of what is in the museum has nothing to do with the Ancients. There are cultural items from all over Charted Space, oddly shaped rocks and personal items from famous Ancients Hunters. All of these are accompanied by holographic displays featuring rather fanciful re-enactments of 'presumed events' like the time the Ancients taught the proto-Hivers how to swim or make fire. The information presented – in a patient, rather condescending tone that turns out to be how Aish speaks – is similarly nonsense. All depictions of the Ancients are different, although most show them as essentially humans with bigger heads, longer fingers and similar minor alterations.



THE MUSEUM OF THE ANCIENTS


Entry Area
Pod 2
Pod 1
Pod 3
Pod 4
Bedroom
Kitchen
Pod 5
Lounge
Bathroom

ENTRY AREA

This 'pod' has a 'who were the Ancients?' theme and seems to be as much about convincing visitors that whatever they knew is wrong as attempting to answer that question. There are physical models, cheaply made holograms and wall displays showing great works, incredible structures and strangely empty landscapes. The (presumed) development, golden age and decline of the Ancients is hinted at, with many questions about what they did and how they did it. The Travellers may suspect that some of the scenes are entirely made-up, or that they depict natural phenomena, or the works of non-Ancient races. At least one of the holos is actually from a very old entertainment vid show.

POD 1

Holographic arrows point to the first 'pod'. This is devoted to who the Ancients were. It 'reveals' that they were humans who evolved on Terra. According to the displays the Ancients were 'more and greater than humans are today', venturing out to perform great works starting a million years ago. They performed wonders, seeding human populations all across the galaxy.

POD 2

Next, the Travellers are directed to Pod 2, which is devoted to the works of the Ancients during their heyday. Apparently they battled all manner of space monsters and set up secret societies on various worlds which still exist today. Here, as in the other pods, there are also exhibits about the lives and times of famous Ancients Hunters. Anyone familiar with docuvid production knows that this is the sort of thing you include when you have too little content to make a proper show.

POD 3

The third pod depicts the decline of the Ancients as they suffered some kind of spiritual collapse. The populations of various worlds became parochial and turned on one another. Some suffered in wars and others were beset by natural disasters. Aid was not forthcoming due to the fragmentation of Ancients society. Throughout the decline story there is a theme; a heroic secret society now known as the Preservers. They fought to save the wondrous society of the Ancients and preserve its secrets when it collapsed.

POD 4

Pod 4 shows the end of the Ancients era. Scattered and diminished, the various worlds have forgotten what they once were. Only the Preservers remembered, collecting their information at a secret base on Terra. Around 50,000 years ago, during the Last Ice Age on Terra, the Preservers were forced to abandon their last stronghold. They made a solemn pact to save what they could and departed for other worlds, each carrying a treasure trove of knowledge. The last traces of the Ancients on Terra were obliterated by ice and the Preservers were scattered. Yet the secret order they founded lives on, protecting the truth and informing those with the wit to understand. The very last display is a shadowy hologram of a person, which shifts depending on who is looking at it. It will morph from being suggestive of the museum's curator to an image of whoever is looking, then back again.

THE PRIVATE AREA

The content of the museum is patent nonsense of course and even if the Travellers know nothing about the Ancients they may suspect it is all made up. This is not quite the case; some of it is extrapolated from real data, although by way of incredible leaps to very distant conclusions. Astute Travellers may also realise that the purpose of the museum is mainly to make visitors think they know nothing and that the curator is one of the secretive Preservers who knows All The Secrets.

The Travellers will eventually attract the attention of the curator, whether through their gales of laughter at the nonsense they are reading or their intense study of the fascinating information his museum presents. Either way, Aish Nirkha approaches them. He emerges from the *NO ADMITTANCE* area, leaving the door open long enough to let the Travellers see the wonders on the other side.

Aish tries to be casual and courteous, although in fact he cannot wait to hold forth about some obscure subject and impress the Travellers with his secret knowledge. His conversation is littered with hooks to draw an interested comment so that he can hold forth and he will provide an answer to the merest hint of a question. This will of course be what Aish wants to say rather than the information the Traveller wanted; any excuse is sufficient to get him talking. If the Travellers ask about the *Garnette*, show Aish any artefacts they have, or just seem interested enough, Aish offers to show them the 'good stuff'.

Pod 5 lies on the other side of the *NO ADMITTANCE* door and despite its large collection of locks and warning signs Aish is desperate to admit people – it is what he lives for. In this supposedly off-limits area, Aish has assembled a collection of more impressive items. This is still a rather random mix of legally-tradable Ancients items and stuff that looks vaguely Ancienty-ish. There is nothing powerful or illegal but it is still a decent collection. Aish will offer a detailed – but unfortunately rather inaccurate – explanation of any artefact the Travellers show him and will defiantly refuse to say where he gets his better artefacts. Of course, he is desperate to do a big reveal, especially since his contact is none other than the captain of the famous *Garnette!* Indeed, Bernadatta Khaled is a personal friend of his!

Once this dam is burst, Aish will spill all manner of tales, insights on matters concerning the Ancients and anything else that enters his head. He wants the Travellers to be impressed with his status as King Ancients Hunter and will gradually become hostile if they are impolite. There is no chance of this turning physical; Aish has a much more powerful weapon at his disposal than violence. He will try to grind the Travellers into submission with endless patronising lectures about how little they know and how much of it is wrong. They can end this by leaving, of course, but until they do Aish will lord it over them – in his own mind anyway.

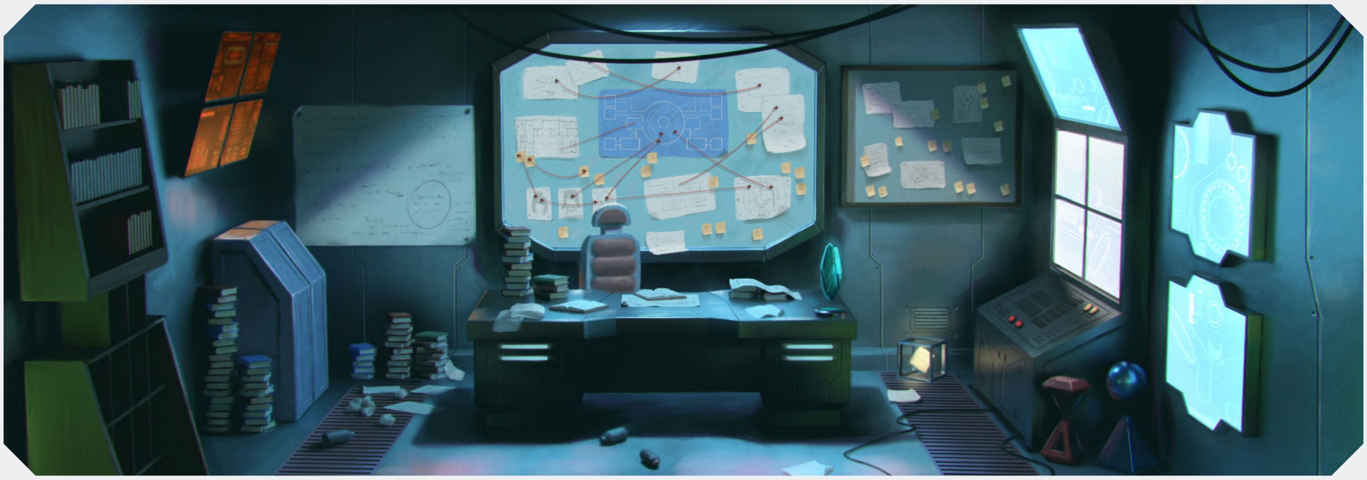
Aish's dwelling is accessed from Pod 5. It is a simple easy-to-set-up porta-home – comfortable enough but not of high quality. The contents are nondescript: a lounge/entry area, kitchen, fresher and bedroom. Perhaps unsurprisingly, Aish lives alone. There are no Ancients artefacts in his dwelling, although plenty of notes and docuvid collections about them. This does not mean he is not 'really' an Ancients Hunter – he truly is, to the bottom of his soul – but he wants his treasures on display where they can feed his ego rather than hidden away, out of sight.

If the Travellers decide to break into Aish's home or ransack the museum they will not find anything more impressive than what is on display. Aish is a delusional Ancientsophile with an over-active imagination and possibly a narcissistic personality. His main value to the Travellers is his ability to recall what he bought from the crew of *Garnette,* and when. He does remember them talking about obtaining 'a specimen', presumably of the Ancients but not where from. They talked about setting up a containment facility in a place called Makintown on Callia. This was just a few days ago.

If the Travellers show Aish the artefacts they have, he will want to know where they came from. He can positively identify the alloy as hull metal from an Ancients starship. One was found drifting a while back in a certain star system – Aish cannot tell the Travellers which one, of course. Perhaps the metal comes from that ship. Beyond that he has little idea but states that the metal was very common among the Ancients. As with everything else he says, Aish's positive identification is based on guesswork.

The jewel he identifies as a meditation focus. It would be set into a band using claws to hold it in place like a conventional ring and worn around the head so that it rests over the 'third eye'. Aish will probably go off on a diatribe about being able to activate psionic powers through meditation assisted by certain pharmaceuticals and claims that this jewel would help with that. He can of course teach the Travellers some meditation techniques if they like.

Aish is wrong about all this but not *entirely*.



AISH AND THE PRESERVERS

Aish Nirkha knows everything about the Ancients but can only reveal some of it because of certain complications he cannot divulge. Or so he says. It will be obvious to the Travellers that he is hinting he is a member of the Preservers and party to great secrets. If the Travellers express an interest in joining the order, Aish will, with irritating patience, explain that if the group exists at all, joining is not a simple matter. He will try to facilitate an introduction to someone who can make a ruling on the Travellers' suitability. This will take some time and would be greatly aided by a show of good faith. By this he means giving him an artefact.

The Preservers are an invention, of course. Well, not entirely. It is possible that a group dedicated to preserving knowledge from the time of the Ancients did or does exist, and from this slim possibility Aish has convinced himself that it is his calling to do so. He has 'identified' signs that certain other Ancients Hunters might be connected to the group, which means it definitely does exist! That in turn means the feeling he has always had of affinity for all things Ancienty must by real and he must be from a Preserver bloodline!

This is how Aish thinks; in grandiose and somewhat random leaps of intuition. He genuinely no longer knows what he read in a standard science book and what he inferred from the proportions of a doorway in a blurry holo. He is right about one thing here, in a roundabout sort of way. He once met a man named Vlen Backett who seemed to know a lot about the right things. The Travellers' questions spark another leap of intuition – Vlen Backett must be a fellow Preserver! Mere moments after the Travellers leave, Aish begins a message of contact in which he explains the situation as he perceives it. When it finally finds Backett it will cause him puzzlement and amusement in equal parts but it will put the Travellers on his radar. Aish Nirkha already was, correctly filed in the 'noisy Deludo' category but the Travellers might be something else…

Holding forth on the subject of the Ancients, Aish is adamant they were in fact human and that there is clear evidence they evolved on Terra. Sometime during the Last Ice Age, as their civilisation was facing collapse, the last of the Ancients left Terra and spread out across the stars. Those that remained were plunged into the Stone Age and finally re-emerged as the Solomani.

The Ancients at that time were a remnant, unable to maintain their fabulous technology. They regressed to become the Vilani, the Zhodani and other humans. In fact, all non-Terran humans are descended from the Ancients who left their homeworld, whereas the Solomani people are the regressed remnants of those who feared to venture out. Aish is quick to point out that he is not demeaning anyone by saying this – his dear friend Bernadatta Khaled is a pure-blooded Solomani and she is a fine individual – it is simply a truth. Some bloodlines retain more of their Ancients heritage than others. His own, for example, is identifiably Ancient which is why he has such an affinity with them.

Confronted with suggestions that some of what he says is contradictory and little of it is supported by evidence, Aish resorts to yet more patient lecturing. He can counter almost any other argument that might be put to him and he *always* knows more than the Travellers. Aish Nirkha will patiently explain to a doctorate-holding scientist how actually *it is not quite like that, but…*

Virtually everything Aish says is self-serving, wrong or both. However, there are some clues to be found within his fountain of misinformation. He refers to Bernadatta Khaled as pureblood Solomani and mentions (albeit for the wrong reasons) that the Solomani had less to do with the Ancients than other humans. Both of these facts might be significant later. More importantly, if Aish can be buttered up or otherwise convinced to impart 'secret' information he will reveal that Bernadatta and the *Garnette* are involved with an individual named Blanca, who makes the occasional foray into Ancients' lore in their datacasts. Nobody knows who or what Blanca actually is, as they use a fanciful holographic representation in their datacasts.

Aish is adamant that Blanca is a Deludo who knows nothing about the Ancients, which might suggest to the Travellers that they are a better prospect than Aish. Also, absolutely nobody knows where Blanca is based – except Aish, who can confirm they operate out of Makintown on Callia. Perhaps surprisingly, this statement is correct.

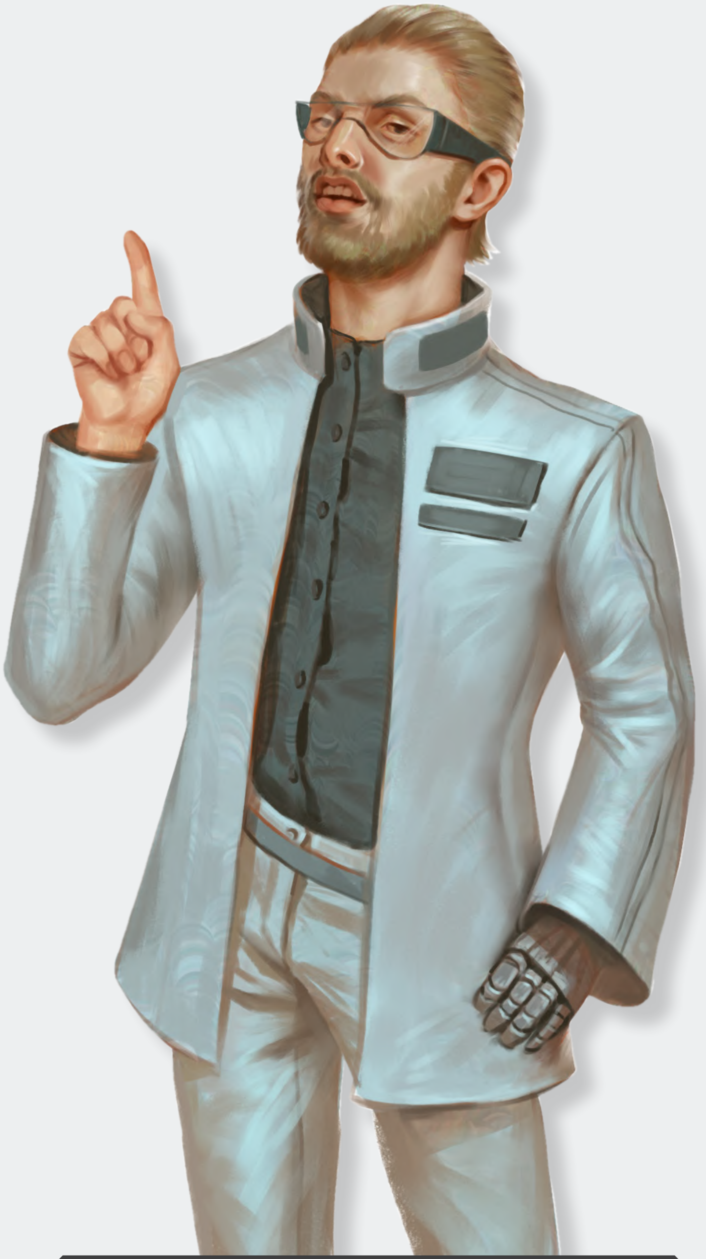
AISH NIRKA,
THE CAPTAIN OF KNOWLEDGE

Aish Nirkha styles himself the ‘Captain of Knowledge’ in his rambling datanet ‘Infodels’. This is a contraction of information delivery but what Aish usually delivers is a long diatribe about how great he is, accompanied by vague snippets of information and some wild pseudo-theory based upon them. Most of his nonsense is connected with the Ancients in some manner but he will veer off into all manner of topics; advanced asteroid mining techniques, the significance of railroads in the social development of Chirper populations or an impromptu strategic analysis of Imperial-Hiver relations. Most of what he says seems plausible enough to someone with minimal knowledge and a certain amount of faith in the Captain of Knowledge, but almost all of it is flat-out wrong.

The Captain of Knowledge has gone so far down the rabbit hole of conspiracy theories and tenuous connections that he no longer knows what is true and what is made-up. As a result he will launch into a discourse about something he knows next to nothing about with complete conviction and will invent details or corroborating evidence along the way. He is intolerant of being corrected by people who merely have a university degree in the subject. He always knows something nobody else does and will patiently explain why everyone else is misinformed.

The problem is that only almost-all of what Aish Nirkha spouts is completely wrong or made up. He does have some good information and contacts who might or might not be more reliable than he is. Aish himself cannot tell what came from a solid source and what is a result of his multi-parsec conclusion jumps; to him it is all true. He has a large following among the wannabee Ancients Hunter communities and whilst most serious investigators will see through him very quickly he continues to be influential.

The referee should note that Aish’s EDU is very low to reflect the probability that what he does know is contaminated by invention and wild inference to the point where he is unlikely to get anything right – but that will not prevent him presenting a great deal of information as if it were all completely correct.



AISH NIRKHA (CAPTAIN OF KNOWLEDGE)

SPECIES	GENDER	AGE
Human	Male	45

TRAITS			—	SKILLS
STR	4	INT	7	Carouse 3, Investigate 2, Leadership 1, Persuade 6
DEX	8	EDU	2	
END	9	SOC	6	

WEAPONS:	None but if you point to any object he will explain how to use it to its most deadly effect.

OTHER ANCIENTS HUNTERS

The Referee can use the following thumbnails of prominent Ancients Hunters whenever the Travellers encounter someone in person or sit through one of their datacasts. Some of these people might be located several sectors away or might even have died, yet remain a presence in the Ancients Hunter communities. The Referee could have some fun with the slagging matches and attempts to one-up or discredit one another over the datanets or if the Travellers meet up with one of these figures.

Walter Zithoen is a well-known figure in both the Ancients and Paranormal hunting communities. He insists that the Ancients were supernatural creatures whose wonders were built with godlike powers rather than advanced technology. He also knows the best methods to detect werewolves and other shapechanging creatures.

AncientsExpert1 is a noisy figure on the datanets, who seems to have a pathological hatred for Aish Nirkha. He presents himself as a Virushi but this is clearly a holographic image and not AncientsExpert1's real identity. His diatribes are more about how clueless and downright annoying the so-called Captain of Knowledge is than anything actually connected with the Ancients, and contain virtually no information – correct or otherwise.

Dr Rox, inevitably referred to as 'Dox Rox', claims to be a former Imperial scientist who was booted from an Imperial research project after asking too many pertinent questions. Dr Rox has a measured, academic tone which sounds convincing and does seem to know a lot of real science. However, information on the Ancients is patchy. Dr Rox claims to know where there are many hidden sites but does not reveal their location. It is claimed that those asking in person will be given better information – but there are those who say Dr Rox is a front for the authorities, setting a trap for hunters.

Prismatix is another concealed-identity individual who is widely thought to be a holographic front for a group of hunters. Prismatix presents as a slowly rotating translucent prism, scattering various wavelengths of light as it turns. Prismatix holds that the Ancients were actually an alliance of species who combined their talents to create wonders then fell back to barbarism when they ceased to cooperate.

Alops461 is a rabid proponent of the Grandfather's Children Theorem. Their appearance changes with every datacast, sometimes in terms of clothing and general style and on other occasions more radically. Not all of this is holographic manipulation; Alops461 seems to be obsessed with constant change. Their message is that there was only one Ancient, a being referred to as Grandfather. Foreseeing great disaster in the distant future, Grandfather planted different variants of humans in places where they would grow differently. When the time is right the leadership of the Solomani will be combined with the psionic talents of the Zhodani and the organisational abilities of the Vilani, supported by the 'lesser' humans. Combined, these talents will allow Humaniti to deal with the crisis and to claim the universe. It is widely supposed that Alops461 is a Solomani, given the prominence they are expected to have in this human-centric gestalt.

ON FROM EGYPT

One way or another the Travellers should have learned that *Garnette* went to Callia. They may also have come to the attention of Vlen Backett, who is a very different sort of individual to Aish Nirkha. Anything 'learned' from the Captain of Knowledge is suspect but there are some truths between the inventions. If the Travellers for some reason failed to realise that Aish was talking out of his metaphorical posterior they might be irritated when they find out they have been given duff information. It is important to draw a distinction here. The Referee did not lie to the Travellers; what the Referee did was present a character whose information was misleading. They might be more careful about corroborating what they hear in the future…

KNOWN HISTORY OF THE ANCIENTS
KNOWN HISTORY OF THE ANCIENTS
2. THE ANCIENTS ARTIFACTS
1. THE ANCIENTS ARTIFACTS

IN FLEETING MEMORIAM

The Travellers have tracked *Garnette* to Callia, in the Glisten subsector. Backwater worlds like Callia receive few visitors and are not well-known to outsiders, making them ideal places to conduct business with people who would prefer not to attract attention. One such is the Ancients expert Blanca, a resident of the small settlement of Makintown.

CALLIA

The Callia system is something of a problem in astronavigational terms. It forms a jump-1 link on the route between Glisten and the Imperial worlds on the fringe of District 268. It has little surface water, no starport to speak of and no easy source of fuel in the form of gas giants. Callia is the reason there is little 'local' trade to District 268 from Glisten. Local, in this context, means originating within the Glisten Cluster.

Callia is a thin-atmosphere desert world with very little water. Settlements are located either where there is a source of surface water, or else built around deep artesian wells which feed into an extensive pipe system to support local agriculture and industry. The population numbers around 800,000 of whom a little more than a quarter are Jonkeereen. Jonkeereen are a human Minor Race genetically engineered to live on desert worlds. They mostly have their own communities but at least 70,000 of them live among the 'mainstream' humans of Callia.

Callia was settled in the early expansions into Glisten, by a typical mixed bag of Imperial humans, with others arriving over the years. Among these were a significant number of Jonkeereen, some of whom acted as guides and advisors to non-desert-adapted humans as they set up towns and industries. There are few frictions between both groups, although gradually the Jonkeereen have drifted together into their own communities. Those communities that are predominantly Jonkeereen tend to have strict rules (as opposed to laws) and a harsher lifestyle than the other humans. Small groups have wandered all over the world and can be found anywhere, while other humans are mostly located within 2,000 kilometres of what passes for a starport.

Callia has a world government of sorts; larger settlements send a representative to the so-called capital, a town called Bekk which is home to some 75,000 people. The fact that Bekk is not the site of the starport says much about Callian lack of interest in offworld events. The council of representatives at Bekk has no real power as such but representatives use it as a forum to make whatever deals and compromises they need with other settlements. In practice, settlements are more or less self-governing within this framework of loose cooperation.

Almost all settlements are ruled by a technical caste of educated individuals, who have created a guild structure to pass on their skills. These individuals control the water supply, industry and agriculture. They rule in return for providing their communities with water and the goods people need, a system that seems to work well enough most of the time. This form of government is known as feudal technocracy and leads to an informal system in Callia's case. Each settlement's water-guild has a number of technicians and engineers plus a few administrative personnel. There is also a small group of enforcers who keep the peace and protect vital water-supply equipment. There is nothing resembling a planetary military.

Society is, in many ways, very liberal. There are few laws as such. However, Callia is a harsh world and the locals know that some activities cannot be tolerated. Only by working together to create a stable society that keeps water flowing can they avoid a thirsty death, so a number of things that are not specifically prohibited by law will still result in outrage and a violent response from enforcers or the population. Most crimes (official and otherwise) on Callia are connected with the water supply. Disruption to society is also a serious offence as it can ripple through into interruption of the water system and no Callian will permit that.

Callia has a reasonable TL6 industrial base in the larger towns, with more remote areas subsisting at TL5 or even 4. There a small surplus for trade among the towns but Callia has nothing much to attract offworld investment. It lacks the infrastructure to export much of its produce even if a market could be found. For the same reasons very little in the way of offworld or higher-tech goods are available.

Some of the towns are linked by a rather basic rail system and there are some roads across the desert. However, few people move around all that much and there is little trade between towns. As a result, each settlement and its outlying region of villages tends to be somewhat insular and not very interested in what happens elsewhere.

CALLIA'S ENVIRONMENT

Callia is prone to occasional dust storms. These are not usually too bad as the thin atmosphere cannot lift dust up far or carry it any great distance. However, a dust storm can be very unpleasant and occasionally destructive. Most buildings have heavy shutters to protect them from the worst of the effects. Not surprisingly, the world does not have a great deal of animal life. What there is tends to take the form of desert-dwelling creatures resembling scorpions and termites. Everything is small and uses little energy. There are no birds and few flying creatures of any sort.

The native vegetation of Callia is mainly made up of cactus-like succulents or low ground-covering creepers. All of the planet's flora is tough and well adapted to desert life. Most of it is inedible to humans but some species of cactus-like plants collectively known as Hsush now form a staple of the human diet on Callia. Hsush is surprisingly tasty but has to be cooked carefully as it has a tendency to become leathery and all but inedible. Jonkeereen use dried Hsush as trail rations when abroad in the desert.

CALLIA

UWP: E550852–6

Starport	E	Frontier installation
Size	5	8,000km
Atmosphere	5	Thin
Hydrosphere	0	Desert World
Population	8	Hundreds of millions
Government Type	5	Feudal technocracy
Law Level	2	Portable energy weapons prohibited
Technology Level	6	Nuclear Power

ARRIVING AT CALLIA

If the Travellers have a ship there will be no problem getting to Callia as it is only one parsec away from Egypt. If not, they will have to wait for one of the few commercial flights that call there. Either way, the Travellers will see the problem caused by Callia's lack of gas giants and minimal starport. Vessels that can carry enough fuel for two parsecs could visit Callia then go elsewhere but since there is little incentive to call at such an insignificant world the capability is better used to jump past Callia between Overnale and Egypt.

Jump-1 ships have to pass through the Callia system but cannot easily obtain fuel to leave. Some ship operators solve this problem by obtaining water ice from planetoids in the belt, although this is a slow and sometimes hazardous way of refuelling. Others carry an auxiliary fuel tank in their cargo hold or use a 'TJ' (two-jump) variant of a standard ship. Fuel is also available, at a vastly inflated price, from a converted naval tanker named *Fuelforsale* which is operated by the Callia Link Fuel Company. Ship operators can expect to pay upwards of Cr1000 per ton of fuel but the time and effort saved is usually worth it.

The tanker also serves as a starport traffic control facility, as if one was needed. The few arriving ships are essentially told to 'get fuel at the tanker, land where you like. Beacon on the surface indicates the official landing spot,' and little else. There is not a lot more to tell, really. If the Travellers want to visit *Fuelforsale* they will be cleared for entry but all weapons have to be left behind on their ship. The tanker does not track ships and does not keep records, although it does have a small complement of fighters to protect passing vessels.

THE CALLIA LINK FUEL COMPANY

The CLF Company has a single corporate asset; a very old naval tanker bought as surplus and refitted to carry a handful of ice-mining shuttles. These seek out ice asteroids and break chunks off, returning them to the tanker for processing into hydrogen fuel. This is then sold to passing starships at a hugely inflated price. This useful service brings in very little money but the company receives two subsidies from the subsector administration. One is to facilitate trade and movement of information by keeping the Callia Link open; the other is to support a squadron of six fighters based on the tanker and flown by mercenaries.

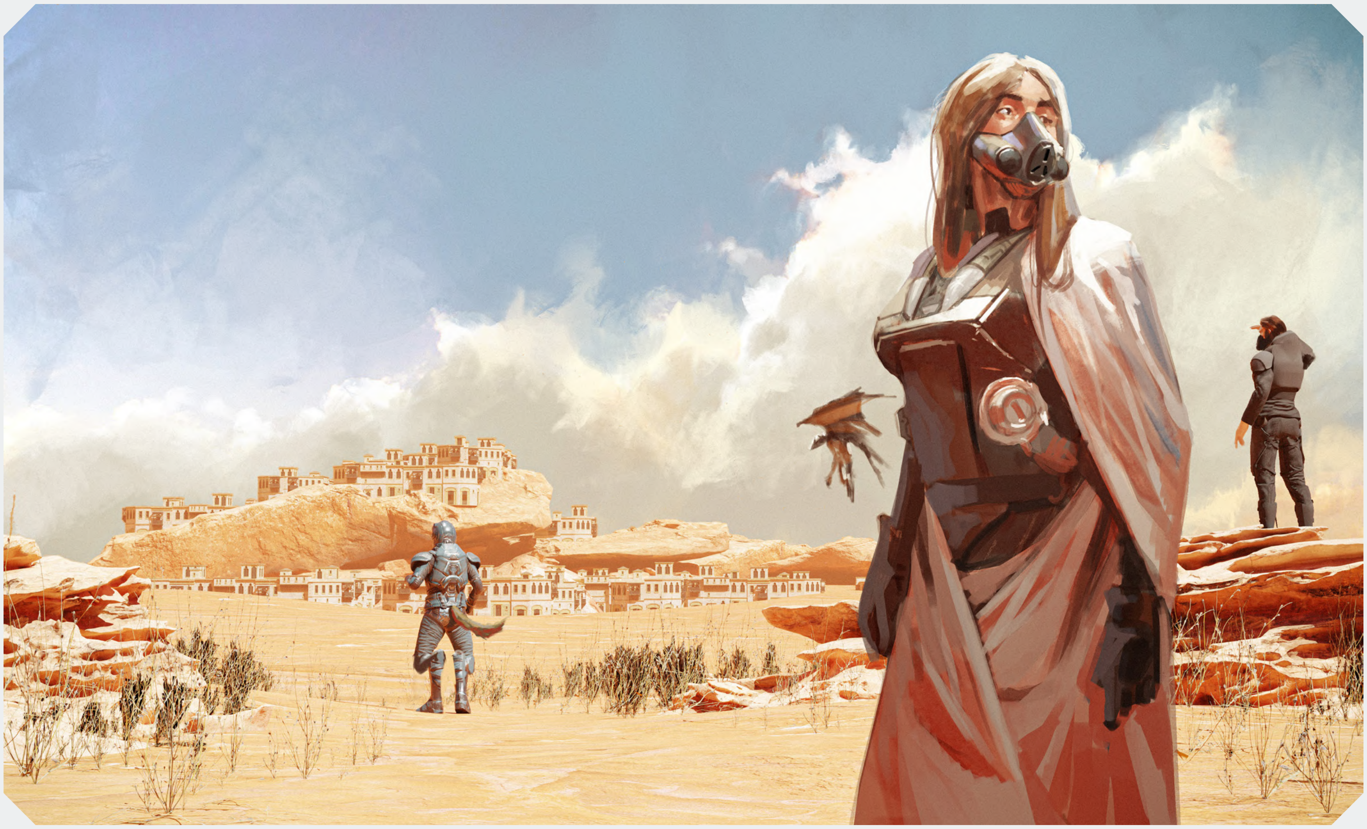
The Callia Link Fuel Company has its headquarters, all personnel and its entire portfolio of assets aboard the tanker *Fuelforsale.* The vessel is very old and may or may not retain jump capability. It is capable of in-system manoeuvre but remains in orbit over Callia almost constantly. Every few months the tanker labours up the gravity well and breaks orbit then re-enters. This resets what is colloquially known as the 'trying to be a starport clock'. Whilst recognition as a highport would be lucrative, the legal and bureaucratic process is tortuous. CLF believes it is better to demonstrate a complete lack of intentions in that area and remain 'temporarily in situ' on a near-permanent basis.

Despite determinedly making it plain the tanker does not want to be considered a starport, the operators receive some visitors who may have small items to trade. There are no cargo-handling facilities other than the usual resupply equipment but items that can be unloaded on a trolley are traded. This is normally modest quantities of luxury goods such as wine or foodstuffs that passing ship operators might want. Goods are sold in shops in the tanker's small visiting area. It is widely suggested that semi-legal and illicit goods are sold under the counter in these establishments.

The Travellers will not find Ancients artefacts for sale here, although they might pick up weapons or hard-to-acquire equipment if a storekeeper can be convinced to show them the 'good stuff'. Interactions at the tanker are not necessary for the progress of the adventure but may be interesting for the Travellers. As with any place they visit, the Travellers may find information, people or items that have no specific location in the campaign or which are not necessarily part of it. For example, the Travellers might seek an Ancients expert at *Fuelforsale* and not find one but stumble upon a rumour leading to a different adventure. Alternatively, they may encounter Vlen or Mercedes almost anywhere. It might well be here.

LANDING ON CALLIA

The world's official landing area – it cannot really be called a starport – is located about 90 kilometres from the capital, Bekk. It has little more than a landing field and a railway station, allowing transit to Bekk or some of the other towns. There is, however, no real reason for the Travellers to land here. A routine scan of the planetary surface shows a vessel landed at the settlement of Makintown, about 1,200 kilometres from the capital. Its signature matches that of *Garnette* and its transponder returns the correct name. There is no personal response from the ship or the nearby town.



NO SHIP?

If the Travellers do not have a ship of their own they may be able to pay the crew of whatever vessel they arrive on to make a quick stop at Makintown before proceeding to Bekk. It is unlikely a ship operator will be willing to hang around whilst the Travellers investigate but they are expecting to meet up with the crew of *Garnette* and should be able to secure transportation with them. Alternatively the Travellers may arrive at Makintown after a long overland transit. They will be able to use *Garnette* – for a time at least – after this point in the adventure, so the problem of getting back offworld will solve itself.

There is no traffic control as such on Callia. The tanker in orbit will have no objections to Travellers landing anywhere they like and may be puzzled why anyone would ask them. If pressed, a member of the tanker crew will wearily explain that they provide fuel for money and that is all. They are not a starport or a planetary traffic control station. In fact, traffic here is not controlled because there is only a ship or two from one week to the next. It would appear from the tone that this question has been asked on multiple occasions.

Approaching Makintown, the Travellers quickly get an impression of a small desert-edge community typical of Callia. It is built on the bank of a rather unimpressive watercourse, with irrigation ditches running out from it to support some rather dry fields. The thin atmosphere does little to filter the rather harsh sunlight, nor to prevent evaporation from the muddy stream which rises from a natural aquifer about 15 kilometres north-west of the town. It terminates in a marshy and very shallow lake about 20 kilometres away, which is surrounded by an oasis of sorts.

Most buildings are single-storey above the ground, with a lower level sunk into the rock below. They are made from stone for the most part, which was clearly dug out of a nearby hillside. Quarried stone was shaped with TL6 equipment and is well-fitted together, creating solid structures which insulate against the hot days and cold nights. The majority of structures are obviously family dwellings but there are also a few workplaces including vehicle maintenance and workshops which support the local economy. A few vehicles are present, all electrically powered and wheeled. Most are connected in some way with farming – tractors, pickup trucks and the like. There is livestock in pens around the town or grazing the sparse grass along the water's edge. These include what appear to be sheep and Barix, a flightless but very noisy bird native to this part of the Marches.

One building stands out, much bigger than the others and with an upper storey. It is on the edge of town and clearly much more recent than most other structures. Most buildings have solar panels on the roof but the design of those atop this one are different. It is not obvious why at first, although there are also communications antennae on the roof. The Travellers can see people going about their business in the town and the fields around it. Livestock is tended, a pickup truck is being repaired outside the town mechanic's home… everything seems normal.

The Travellers will easily be able to spot the scout/courier *Garnette* landed on the opposite side of the river. It is on an area of higher ground which has clearly been used as a landing area several times by small ships like *Garnette*. There are no people around the ship but there is plenty of room to land. From there it is a short walk down a steep path to the bridge into town.

GARNETTE

The scout/courier *Garnette* is standing on the landing field at Makintown. Her transponder is active and internal systems are powered at a low level. Her entry points are locked and she makes no response. Enterprising Travellers who climb up to look in the bridge viewports will see nothing out of the ordinary but no crewmembers. Unless they do something dramatic like blasting a hole in the hull the Travellers will only be able to enter the vessel through her open cargo ramp.

The ship overall is in good working order but is clearly old. It has been repaired numerous times and shows signs of very serious combat damage in the past. Travellers with a naval background or who have seen the results of ship-to-ship action will be sure that at some point this vessel has been hammered badly enough to take her out of service. Her own internal records corroborate this. She has no history before 998, when she was recommissioned as *Garnette.* This is unusual; normally rebuilt vessels retain information on their former service even if the registry is changed.

The ship's airlock is sealed but the cargo ramp is extended. This might suggest the crew are in the middle of something or they are not worried about intruders. The actual reason is rather different, however. The crew of *Garnette* are all dead but the Travellers may get to know them from exploring the ship. Bernadatta was the owner-aboard, assisted by a Vargr engineer who went by Nanto and a human pilot/astrogator named Indi. Their details are found on page 95.

BRIDGE SECTION

The ship's bridge and office are standard for the type. The bridge is surprisingly clean for such a vessel, with minimal clutter and no signs of 'sloppiness' like food remains or coffee rings on the consoles. Although old, all equipment has been well maintained and is in good working order. If the Travellers have the ship's access codes they can take control and begin to operate the vessel once these are correctly entered.

The office is a polar opposite of the bridge. It served as Bernadatta's 'madness room' where she stuck flimsies with data or her own analytical scrawlings on every vertical surface. There is string connecting some of them, notes pinned to other notes and presumably some kind of system to make sense of it all. Bernadatta was using different colours of markers, string, paper and pins, possibly at random.

There are books on the shelves – actual paper books – and more of them open on the desk. In the centre of a strangely clear space lies a large folio of handwritten pages, each carefully sealed in a polymer jacket and recompiled into a volume with a genuine leather binding. There are hundreds of pages, written in cramped and barely legible handwriting. A casual glance reveals some kind of prose-poem, using convoluted thought patterns and with no vestige of rhyme, metre or consistency of line length.

The front cover is embossed in gold and the leather is of very good quality. This book is clearly a valued possession, as well it might be to an Ancients Hunter. This is the supposedly-mythical original manuscript of *Twilight's Peak*. There is no indication as to where Bernadatta got it.

AIR LOCK AND TRANSVERSE CORRIDOR

The airlock is locked but once the Travellers present access codes it and the internal doors will open for them automatically. Getting the codes might require a foray into the town to locate one of the crewmembers or their electronic devices. The transverse corridor is, like the rest of the ship, clean and tidy but showing its age. Every surface is dinged or chipped, and there is just the slightest hesitation as the iris valves fore and aft begin to open. Lights are dim in all areas until someone enters or opens the door, at which point they come to life with just a little reluctance.

Opposite the airlock is a locker. It is unusually orderly for such a vessel, with neatly racked tools and spares. A gun rack holds four snub revolvers and a variety of ammunition for them, and has spaces for another four. There is an almost equal mix of tranq and high-explosive armour-piercing rounds. There is nothing very unusual in the locker, other than parts of several other snub pistols and a variety of experimental drug delivery devices made out of them.

LIVING QUARTERS

The forward two cabins are both used by Bernadatta; one for living and one as an overspill wardrobe now that Sorrel has left the ship's company. Both cabins are extremely neat and tidy. If the Travellers search they will find a few useful items; money clips with just under Cr75000 in cash and some more paper books. These are mostly collections of Ancients lore and include a rare copy of Professor A's works. The aft cabins were used by Bernadatta's crewmates: Nanto and Indi. It is clear that Nanto was a Vargr and something of a slob. His mess stops at the cabin door but inside it is rampant. There is clothing on the floor, odd shoes in strange places, nothing where it should be. Indi's cabin is much neater, with aide-memoire charts on the walls and study guides on the shelf. It would appear she was continuing her studies but this is not the case; in fact she was teaching Bernadatta how to operate the ship.

WORKSHOP

The standard scout/courier has a workshop on the port side of the main deck. This part of the vessel was heavily damaged by weapons fire and rebuilt as a utility space which was later converted into a sort of multipurpose laboratory. Currently there are chemicals stored here, some of which can be combined into an exotic tranquiliser. An ammunition loading machine has been repurposed to create snub pistol rounds containing this drug. If analysed, the drug is unusual. It would have a mildly toxic effect on most human-like creatures, doing 1D damage in addition to any impact. There is nothing in the lab to indicate its purpose, since the crew all knew what it was. In fact the drug is designed to control the creature brought to Callia aboard *Garnette*. There are two versions; one intended to be delivered medically through a low berth; the other is a fast-acting variant delivered by more violent means.

LIVING SPACES

The probe drone chamber and air/raft bay have been rebuilt into a common area with a well-equipped galley. The original ship's locker, adjacent to this space, has been repurposed for food and wine storage. Someone aboard the ship liked to cook and was willing to pay for top-end ingredients. The Travellers may be able to figure out from the precise arrangement of the kitchen that it was Bernadatta. They will probably never know but dinner aboard *Garnette* was a civilised affair to be properly dressed for. Even Nanto made an effort.

The only thing out of place in the galley is a large packet of dried fruit and nuts which has been messily ripped open, spilling some of the contents. It sits at one end of an otherwise spotless counter, beneath a cupboard door that has been left open. There is nothing sinister about this but the Travellers might figure out that Nanto's last act was to make a mess in Bernadatta's tidy kitchen – life aboard *Garnette* in a nutshell.

ENGINEERING SPACES

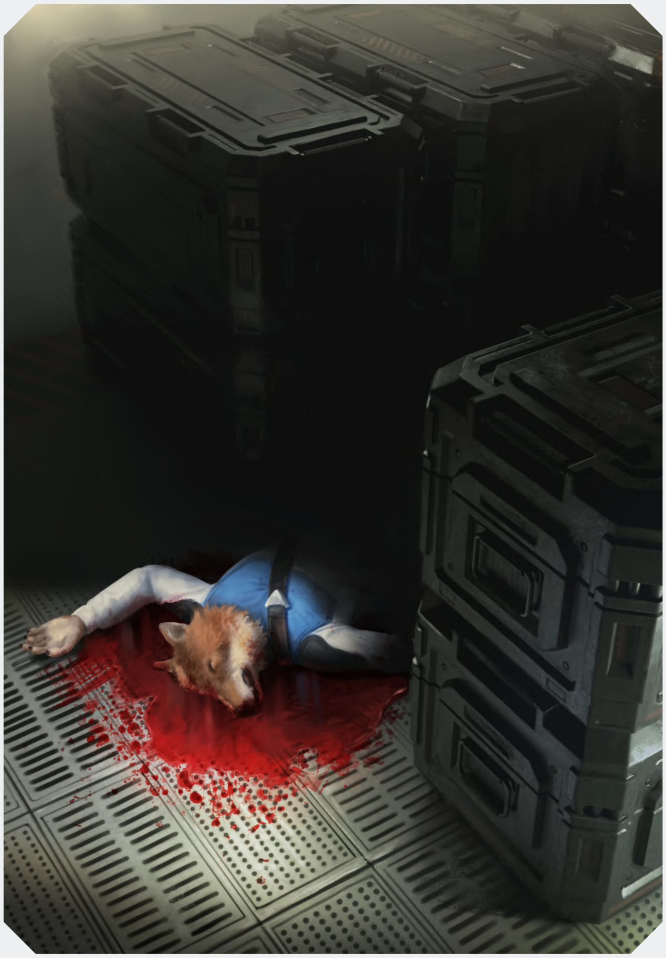
Despite Bernadatta's insistence on tidiness and having everything in its place, the engineering spaces are a bit of a mess. There are tools and spares lying about where they can be tripped over, or left on consoles where they have leaked lubricant. The drives are old but in excellent working order. The fuel tanks are half full, if the Travellers care to check.

LOWER DECK

The lower deck can be accessed from above but since the cargo ramp is open it is likely to be the Travellers' point of entry to the ship. The first thing that strikes the Travellers is the smell of blood. The source can be found behind a group of crates. A Vargr lies dead on the floor, apparently savaged from behind by some creature with large claws and teeth. A loaded snub pistol is still holstered at his belt. If the Travellers think to check they will find it contains obviously modified tranq rounds. The Vargr also has a double-barrelled 'coach gun' (essentially a short-barrelled but full-stocked shotgun) slung over one shoulder. It is loaded with standard buckshot and there are seven more shells in loops on his belt. This is Nanto. What happened to him is detailed on page 78.

In the cargo hold are a few boxes of supplies and a couple of electric offroad cycles but the rear of the area is more likely to pique the Travellers' interest. It contains an overbuilt cryo-stasis unit, similar to a low berth used to transport a large animal. The unit is smashed and it is clear whatever was inside got out. There is some damage to containers in the cargo bay but no sign of the occupant.

Closer examination of the area reveals that the rear of the cargo area was once a secure cargo locker. The fittings where the heavy doors were added and later removed are still evident and were used to secure the cryo-stasis unit. This part of the hold once held a suite of data storage and processing equipment, back when the vessel was named *Baleveny* and belonged to the Scout Service. If the Travellers can get access to records from the time, which are unlikely to be classified but will be found only at scout bases, they can find out which scout vessels were modified in this manner. There were several, most of which are listed as withdrawn from service or scrapped. *Baleveny* is noted to have received crippling combat damage and was sold to an undisclosed private operator for scrap or repair.



THE GARNETTE

TYPE: S (SULIEMAN CLASS)

The scout ship is built for exploration, survey and courier duties, with many thousands in service throughout Charted Space. It is an exemplar of a mass-produced ship in the Third Imperium. Despite the small 100-ton hull, the Type-S has proven itself a versatile design, capable of handling a wide range of missions. Common minor modifications include enhancing the filtration systems by adding biospheres, placing beam lasers in the turret and installing laundry and a galley (four tons of common areas) in the cargo hold. Many substantial revisions have become their own ship classes, such as the Type-J seeker. While two crew positions are listed, it is often crewed by a single pilot/astrogator, as the only person aboard, or carrying other Travellers with no ship skills. When extra Travellers need crew positions to give them something to do, they are typically assigned as gunner (if the turret has weapons), engineer, sensor operator, medic, steward or marine, in that order of priority.

TL12		Tons	Cost (MCr)
Hull	100 tons, Streamlined	—	6
Armour	Crystaliron, Armour: 4	6	1.2
M-Drive	Thrust 2	2	4
J-Drive	Jump 2	10	15
Power Plant	Fusion (TL12), Power 60	4	4
Fuel Tanks	J-2, 12 weeks of operation	23	—
Bridge		10	0.5
Computer	Computer/5bis	—	0.045
Sensors	Military Grade	2	4.1
Weapons	Double Turret (empty)	1	0.5
Craft	Docking Space (4 tons)	5	1.25
	Air/Raft	—	0.25
Systems	Fuel Processor (40 tons/day)	2	0.1
	Fuel Scoops	—	—
	Probe Drones x10	2	1
	Workshop	6	0.9
Staterooms	Standard x4	16	2
Software	Manoeuvre	—	—
	Jump Control/2	—	0.2
	Library	—	—
	Intellect	—	—
Cargo		11	—
Total: MCr41.045			

Crew

Pilot, Astrogator, Engineer

Hull: 40

Running Costs

MAINTENANCE COST

Cr3079/month

PURCHASE COST

MCr36.9405

Power Requirements

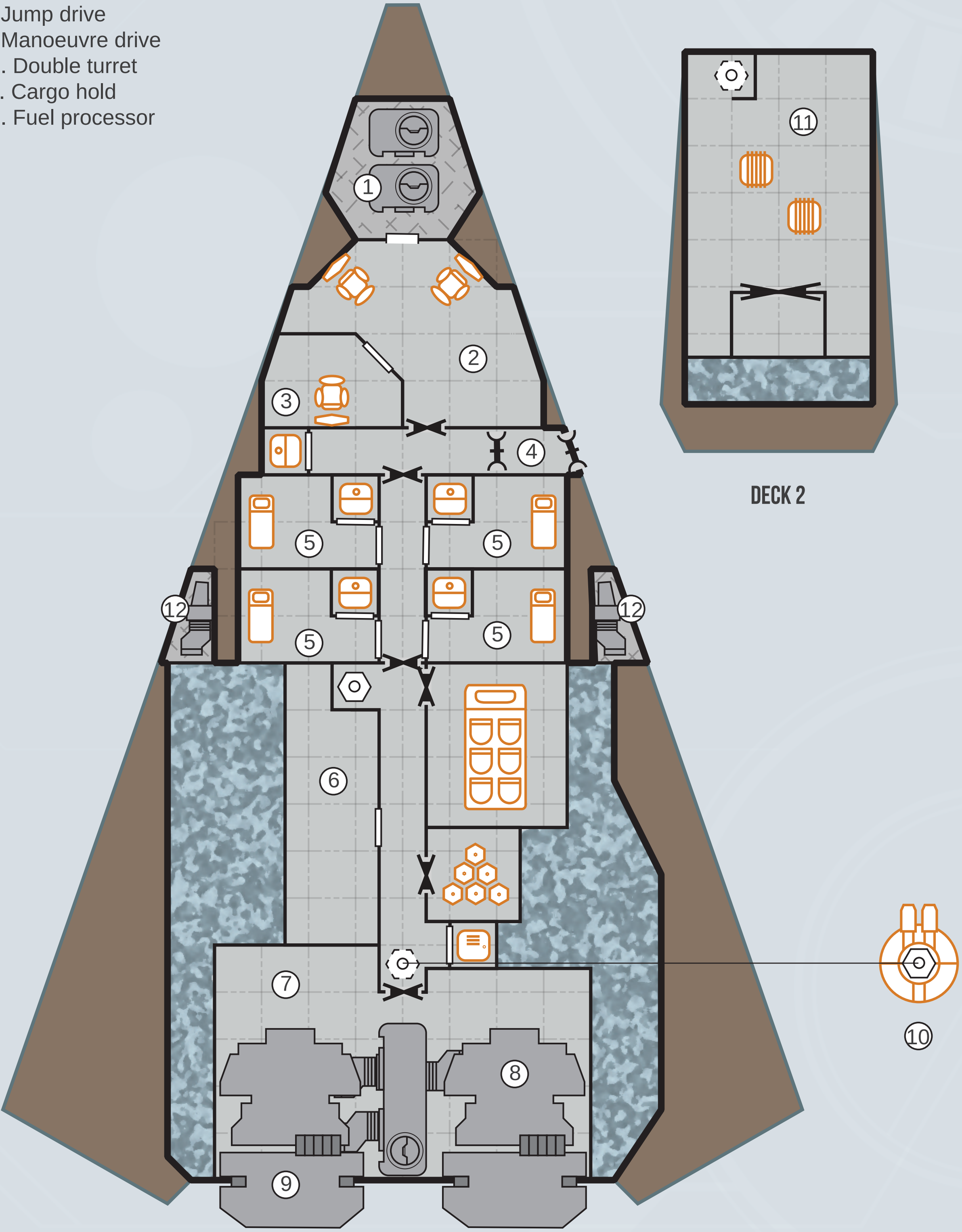
Basic Ship Systems	20
Manoeuvre Drive	20
Jump Drive	20
Sensors	2
Fuel Processor	2

SCOUT COURIER

LEGEND

1. Sensors
2. Bridge
3. Office
4. Airlock
5. Stateroom
6. Workshop
7. Power plant
8. Jump drive
9. Manoeuvre drive
10. Double turret
11. Cargo hold
12. Fuel processor

1 square = 0.5 Ton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DECK 2

DECK 1

WHAT HAPPENED ABOARD *GARNETTE?*

The creature captured by Bernadatta and her crew possesses a form of invisibility which is detailed on page 37. Rather than actively making a person not-see it in the way that Chirpers can do, the creature triggers a reaction implanted in all species the Ancients have modified. Essentially the affected person self-edits the creature out of their perception and consequences of its actions are explained by the affected person's imagination. Not everyone is affected the same way or to the same extent.

It is possible to become immune to this effect and some creatures are never affected at all. Bernadatta, as a pureblood Solomani, did not have the genetic programming to not-perceive the creature, whilst her crewmates had learned to bypass it. However, Nanto was still slightly susceptible. Whilst the others were in town speaking with Blanca, Nanto checked on the creature and was affected. Essentially he forgot the thing was in the cryoberth, why the cryoberth was there and everything to do with the medication he was supposed to deliver.

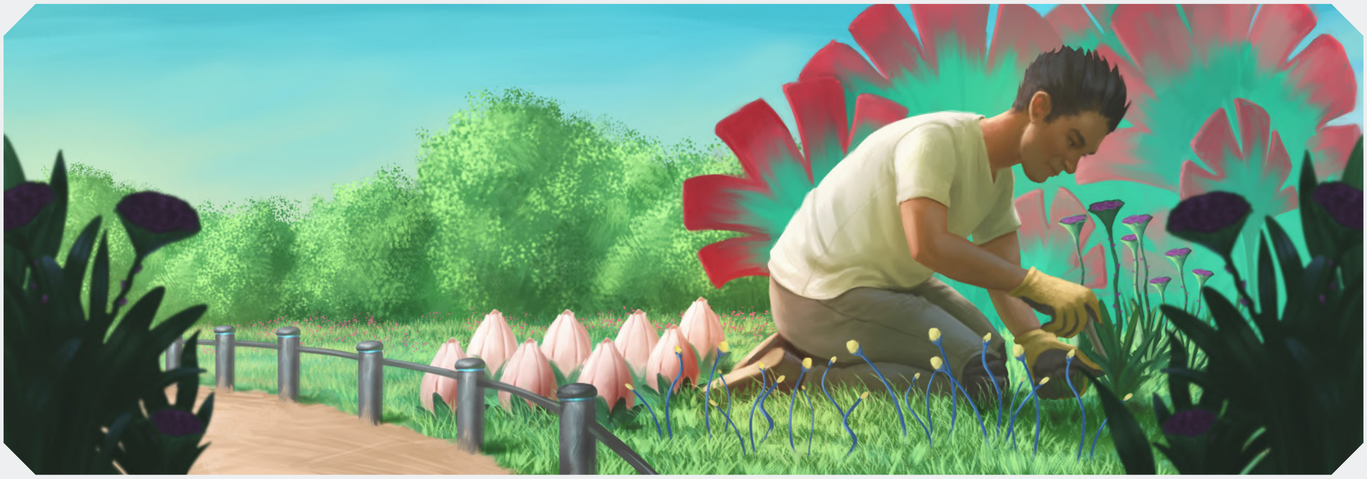
Nanto's untidy and disorganised nature was his undoing. He suddenly could not remember why he had come into the cargo bay or what he was supposed to do with the canister of chemicals he was holding. The presence of a livestock type cryoberth was another mystery. It was clearly – to him – empty yet running. Nanto decided to run a clearing cycle and diagnostic on the unit. He noticed a couple of tools he had mislaid and picked them up, stopped by the galley to grab a handful of dried fruit and nuts, then wandered back into the cargo bay again wondering why he was carrying his gun. It must be because the cargo bay door was open, he decided, and promptly forgot about the matter.

Meanwhile the creature was becoming conscious. The clearing cycle could not begin without waking the occupant, so Nanto had unknowingly set it to do that. Although sluggish, the creature was able to break out of the cryoberth and savage Nanto before escaping out of the cargo bay. It needed to absorb energy, which came in part from the hot, bright sun and in part from the people it killed along the way. It was effectively invisible to the townsfolk but Bernadatta and Indi could see it. They did their best, wounding the creature, but it killed both and went to ground to heal up. Since then it has been preying on the townsfolk and building its strength.

MAKINTOWN

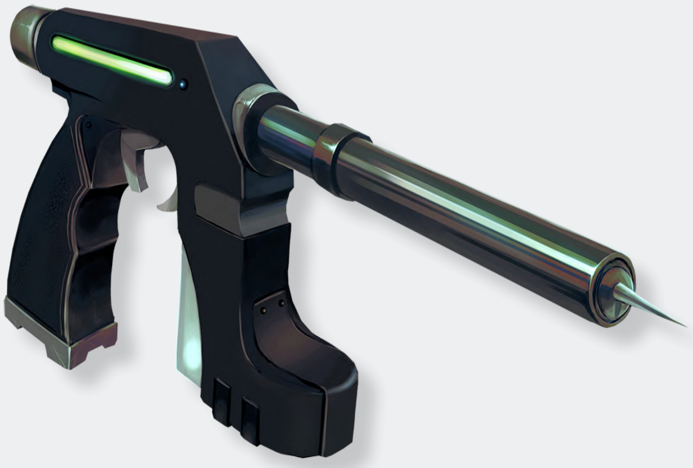
Makintown is a settlement of around 400 people, most of whom are farmers or raise livestock. Houses are low and of stone construction, although it is shaped and dressed to TL6 standards. Underground conduits handle sewage, water recycling and power cabling, with most power coming from solar panels to be stored and distributed communally. Most of the populace are typical humans, with a handful of Jonkeereen scattered among them. Nomadic groups of Jonkeereen sometimes visit the town to trade. Relations with them are distant but cordial.

All dwellings have a garden area, which is irrigated by a diverter from the household water supply. Most locals grow vegetables plus a few decorative plants, and gardens are a source of pride for the average citizen. The 'streets' in between are of packed earth and might become a sea of mud if the area received much rain. There is little chance of that, however.



TRANQ DELIVERY SYSTEMS

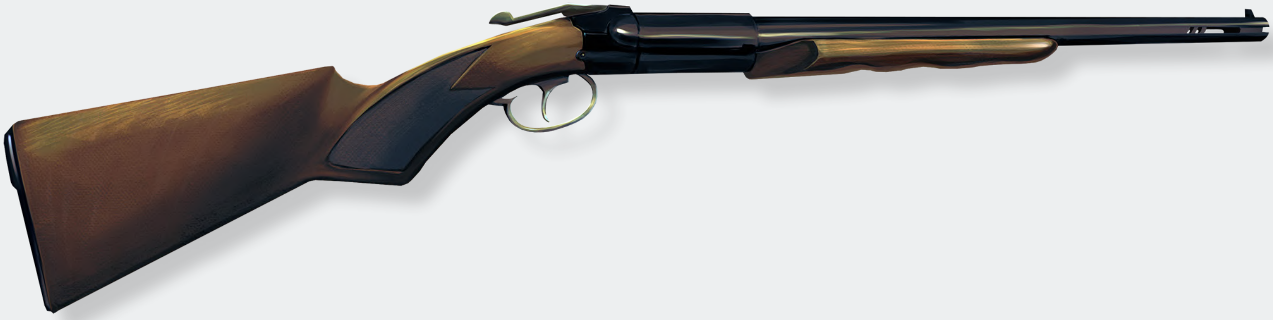
Aboard *Garnette* there are various homemade devices for delivering drugs to an unwilling target. Most make use of snub pistol tranq cartridges, either in their standard form or modified to use as a propellant. The simplest device is a tubular handle about 120 centimetres long with a cup-type cartridge holder on the end. The tip of a snub pistol tranquiliser round (or, in theory, some other type of ammunition) protrudes from the end. When the end is rammed into the target (requiring a successful melee attack) the cartridge is fired. This causes some damage to the target but is mainly a means of introducing drugs. The second type is a sort of rifle created by attaching a smoothbore barrel extension to a snub pistol. Whilst clumsy, this device does allow delivery from a safer distance. Both weapons do 1D damage to the target and deliver a dose of whatever drug has been set up.



Weapon	TL	Range	Damage	Kg	Cost	Capacity	Ammunition Cost	Traits
Tranq Prodder	8	Melee	1D+ drug	1.2	Cr200	1	Varies	Stun
Tranq Shooter	8	10	1D+Drug	1.4	Cr250	6	Varies	Stun

NANTO'S COACH GUN

Nanto's favoured weapon was simple and reliable. Its limited firepower was not a problem; Nanto used it to intimidate or deter smart threats and scare off animals with a loud bang. Nanto never had any intention of going near a protracted gunfight. Weapons of this sort resemble a short-barrelled sporting shotgun but are marketed for the personal defence and shipboard emergency marketplace. Reloading is by way of break-open action, allowing different ammunition types to be loaded in each barrel. The relatively short barrel increases pellet spread and reduces effective range. The latter is not a problem in a weapon designed to be brought on-target quickly in a sudden close encounter. Nanto only has combat shot for his weapon but less-lethal 'stingball' ammunition is available. The weapon uses a 16mm shell which will not fit in conventional shotguns, largely as a marketing ploy.

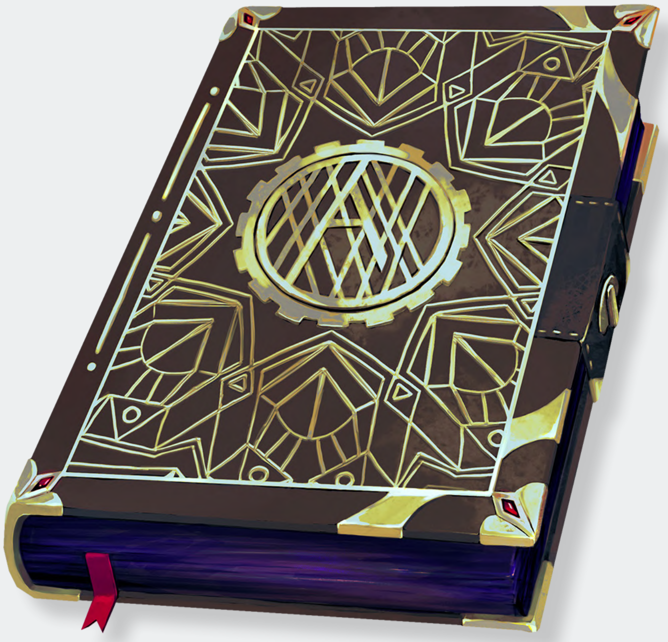


Weapon	TL	Range	Damage	Kg	Cost	Capacity	Ammunition Cost	Traits
Coach Gun (lethal load)	7	30m	3D+4	3.2	Cr100	2	Cr2	—
Coach Gun (less lethal load)	7	30m	1D+2D Stun	3.2	Cr100	2	Cr2	—

THE WORKS OF PROFESSOR A

Few Ancients Hunters have not heard of Professor A, one of the greatest authorities on the subject ever to have lived. His works were suppressed in the 1080s, data expunged from public databases and individuals forced to delete or hand over their copies. Professor A's works now exist only as a few treasured paper copies. Although some of the data is wrong and coverage is by no means complete, the Travellers will gain DM+1 on all attempts to figure out Ancients technology if they are able to consult this book. Its value varies according to who is offered it – to some it is just a collectible book whilst to others it is a priceless trove of knowledge. If the Travellers transcribe the book to electronic storage it will delete itself. The only way to prevent this is to use a storage device which does not contain standard firmware – instructions to recognise and delete the text are embedded in all standard comms, portacomps and the like. This is not the only data they will suppress; once the Travellers find out this is possible they may realise other information is being hidden this way.

Item	TL	Kg	Cost
Book: The Works of Professor A	9	0.5	Varies



INVESTIGATING MAKINTOWN

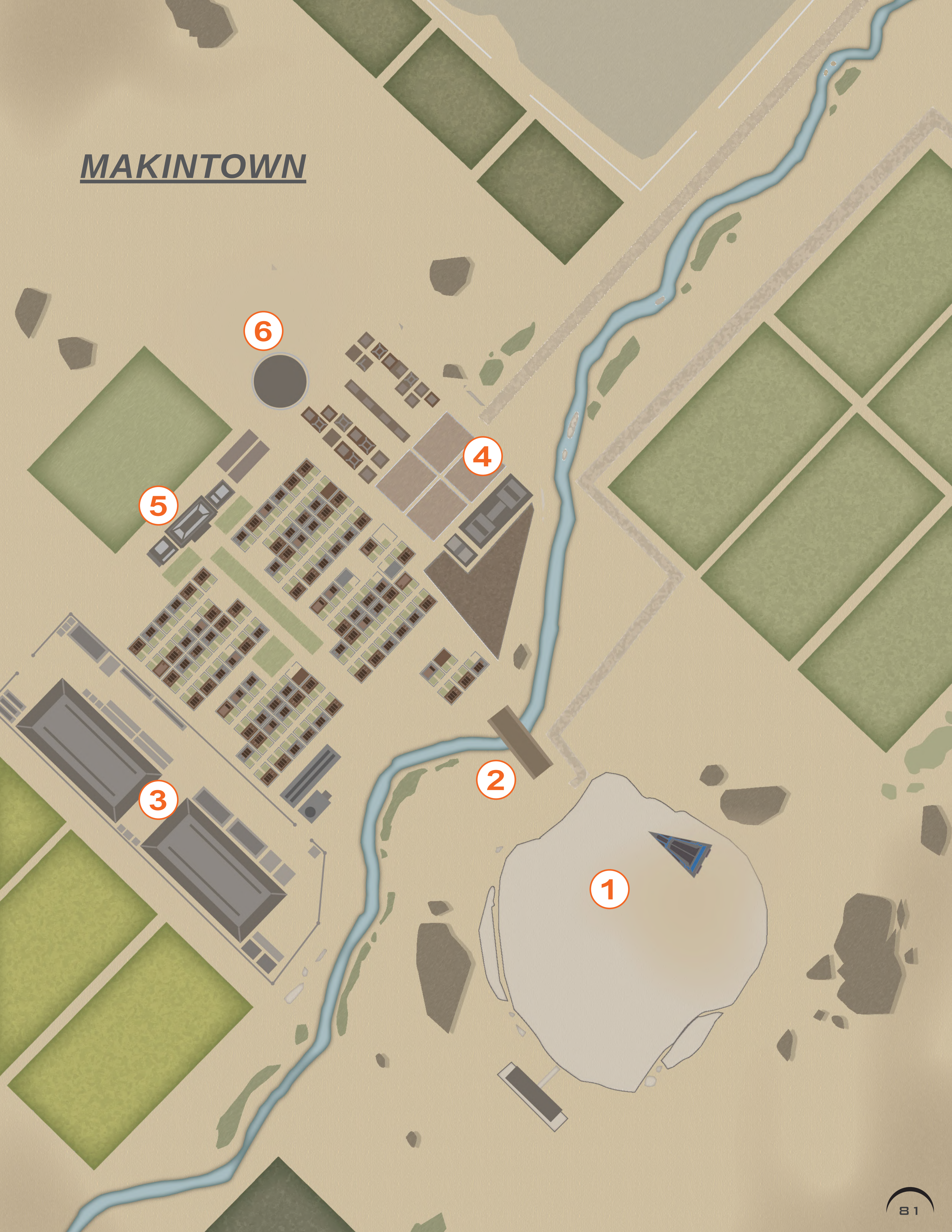
Perhaps the oddest thing about Makintown is that it is business-as-usual. People are living their normal lives as if nothing has happened. This means that during daytime most people will be busy with tasks connected to their occupation. Tractors are moving around in the fields and herders are looking after the animals. The town's technicians are fixing tools or working on vehicles. There is time for a quick chat when friends pass one another in the street and the Travellers will see no signs of alarm among the populace.

The townsfolk are well aware that a starship just landed at their town. This is unusual but not a cause for alarm. The odd group of starfarers, usually but not always Bernadatta's crew, visits Blanca. Less often a ship will land to do some trade, although this is usually at a personal scale as crews stock up on fresh meat in return for offworld trinkets and gadgets. There is no freight money to be made in a place like this. The Travellers will attract mild curiosity and nothing more if their actions seem normal.

If the Travellers do something that seems weird, such as breaking into a house, or are seen in a place where visitors would not normally go, the locals will be as interested as anyone else would. People will ask what they are doing if they are in an unusual place, such as the storage warehouses, and they will be confronted if they have broken into a home or otherwise acted in an antisocial manner.

The vast majority of locals do not think anything is amiss. They know Bernadatta and her crew are making one of their periodic visits to Blanca but strangely nobody recalls seeing them. They must be at Blanca's house or still in their ship… or maybe they went exploring the outback. Travellers skilled in spotting lies will realise the locals are telling the truth… or think they are.

Exploring the town will reveal some out-of-the-ordinary occurrences. Most of these can be discovered in any order, depending on what the Travellers do. The obvious information should be available to anyone who looks, whilst someone with relevant skills might pick up on subtler clues either with a suitable check or automatically. Travellers with a skill level 2+ in a relevant field will notice things that others might not.


MAKINTOWN
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About 150 of the town's 400 inhabitants have seen the creature and therefore cannot accept its existence. Most of the remainder are puzzled at some slightly odd things that have happened but are busy with their daily lives. Whilst there is a sense of unease among these people, friends they have known all their lives have provided explanations which have generally been accepted. Some occurrences seem downright strange but strange occasionally happens here as a result of Blanca's presence.

A small minority, perhaps 30 people or so, do not accept the explanations or have encountered contradictions which have not yet been 'resolved' by sighting the creature. Some have retreated to their homes, others are conducting an investigation as best they can. Nobody wants to believe something bad is happening; everyone is looking for a rational explanation. The problem is that the most likely 'rational' explanation is one invented by the person's subconscious just after sighting G482.

LANDING FIELD (1)

The 'landing field' is an area of exposed rock elevated a few metres above the town. It is smoothed off and some locals will claim the Jonkeereen tell a tale about how the great giant S'ct-S'vic sat there and flattened the rock with his gigantic butt. This is a local joke; the field was flattened off by a work party from the Scout Service as part of an infrastructure improvement project that fizzled out. No fuel is available, nor are there any amenities. It would be possible to refuel from the river with a long enough hose but the locals would be annoyed as there is little enough water at the best of times.

The *Garnette* is landed on the field, leaving plenty of room for other ships.

BRIDGE (2)

The river is a shallow, muddy trickle in the bottom of a gulley at this point. It is crossed by a bridge made of stone panels fused into a rather unattractive but extremely robust structure. This is beyond the locals' capabilities but easily explainable in terms of equipment brought in briefly to get the job done. There is even a plaque with Scout Service insignia and code numbers denoting the project and job number. If the Travellers really care, they can look this up at a decent port. They will find that the Scout Service was engaged in several such local assistance projects in conjunction with the Imperial Colonial Office from the 950s. This came to an end with the outbreak of the Third Frontier War and was never resumed on any significant scale.

There are bloodstains in the middle of the road near the bridge on the town side. They are extensive enough to suggest a person or large animal was killed there. Nobody recalls any such thing and will attribute it to an accident. Perhaps someone was transporting a carcass home from the livestock area and dropped it messily? This is a weak explanation but nobody has a better one. It will be obvious to the Travellers that this was a large creature which lost a lot of blood. A carcass falling off the back of a pickup truck could explain the amount of blood… possibly… but there are drag marks which suggest the body was dragged away in the direction of the river-bed. Nobody seems to have noticed this, or cared.

The trail can easily be followed to the edge of the river, where a body has been tumbled down the riverbank into the water. The corpse of Indi lies in shallow, muddy water under the bridge. She has a holster on her belt for a snub pistol but it is missing. A search will find it in the water nearby, loaded with tranq rounds. A couple of shots have been fired. The cartridge casings are to be found against a building near the town end of the bridge.

Indi was attacked whilst heading back from the town to her ship and managed to move towards the bridge before being brought down. Her body was dragged under the bridge where it was dismembered messily by what appears to be a large animal. This was of course G482, which fed on her corpse before moving away. The Travellers might expect more fuss about such an occurrence but those who saw it provided 'rational' explanations to those who did not and nobody in town is quite ready to accuse them of lying… or murder.

If the Travellers take a proper look under the bridge they will find more body parts. Someone with Medic or relevant Science skills can determine that the parts are from at least two, possibly three, humans in addition to Indi. All have been torn apart as if with claws and messily eaten. There are other body parts up and down the river, always stashed somewhere there is cover. There are no signs of gunshot wounds on any of them, nor any other artificial weapon.

WAREHOUSES (3)

Two large stone-built warehouses, subdivided internally, house the town's stores of grain and other foodstuffs. Some parts of the buildings are set up as bulk freezers, others are refrigerated. The remainder is at a low ambient temperature which is little affected by outside conditions. The warehouses are not really secured as such; there are a few lockable containers but for the most part everyone knows what belongs to whom. Theft is rare in a small community like Makintown, largely because it is dealt with vigorously by 'unofficial' means.

Inside one of the warehouses is the body of Bernadatta. She is close to the entrance, apparently having collapsed trying to reach the doors to get out. Someone has walked through the pool of almost-dry blood around her body, into the warehouses and back out again. There are two sets of prints but not much of a trail since the blood was almost dry. A closer investigation reveals a partial print which appears to have been made by an animal foot with elongated claws.

LIVESTOCK AREA (4)

A fenced area with buildings containing feed and a rather basic veterinarian's clinic, this part of town is also used as a market. The small population means that a 'livestock market' typically consists of a few people having a chat as they select an animal for whatever purpose. The buyer is almost always the town butcher or another farmer. Occasionally hunting parties of Jonkeereen bring in game they have taken, some of which might seem exotic to offworlders but it makes an interesting change of diet for the locals.

TOWN CENTRE (5)

The town centre is more a utility building than an administrative centre. There are a couple of offices in this building but most of it is dedicated to storage for tools used to maintain the water recycling and sewage treatment equipment in the lower level. This system provides nearly full-time employment for a couple of technicians, who are sometimes found elsewhere maintaining any other systems that need it. This building might be completely empty for much of a given day depending on whether there is a burst pipe somewhere or the techs have agreed to lend a hand with some necessary task.

THE ROUND BUILDING (6)

This structure stands out as it is the only building in town that is not rectangular. It is built of the same stone as the rest of the town but has been shaped into curves to create a smooth exterior and domed roof. Atop the latter is a collection of antennae and what at first look like solar panels. In fact they are something slightly different, designed to trap heat rather than directly generate electricity.

The building is two storeys high above-ground and is notable in that it does not have a garden. There is a stone-faced walkway around the base of the structure, wide enough to park most vehicles but there are none present. Asking anyone in town elicits the same response – this is Blanca's house. Blanca is well-known to the locals and has lived in Makintown for over a decade. She brought in contractors to build her home and they fixed a few problems for others such as solar panels and water systems at the same time. Since then Blanca has been a good neighbour, although she eats a lot of meat compared to everyone else. The Jonkeereen usually go to her first with a catch and she always buys something from them.

WHAT HAPPENED AT MAKINTOWN?

Bernadatta and Indi went into town to visit Blanca. As they returned, G482 was moving into the town seeking warmth and food to repair its body. Although they could perceive it, Bernadatta and Indi did not spot the creature due to its innate stealth. They were ambushed near the bridge and Indi was brought down. Bernadatta initially evaded the creature and called both Blanca and *Garnette* for help. G482 made a quick meal of Indi then went after Bernadatta. It detected her signal and began stalking her. This caused many of the locals to see the creature and go into denial about it.

It may never be known but Bernadatta Khaled made a brave end. Realising she was being hunted, Bernadatta tried to lure the creature away from the town, then got it to chase her into the cool warehouses at the north end of town. She planned to lock it inside but found it oddly reluctant to enter the cold space. In the end Bernadatta had to use herself as bait. She got the doors shut and engaged the creature with her tranq-loaded snub pistol. She did in fact manage to bring the creature down but succumbed to her wounds shortly thereafter.

G482 was weakened by the tranquilisers and lack of heat to draw energy from, and became dormant. Earlier today someone entered the warehouse and spotted it – and succumbed to its invisibility effect. They walked through a pool of Bernadatta's blood, stepped over her corpse and carried a few crates of produce into the warehouse. Afterward, whoever it was went about their business oblivious of what had happened. G482, for its part, was able to crawl outside and take in energy from sunlight. After a solar-fuelled killing spree it made its way out of the town to heal and replenish its energy. It is currently hiding, warming itself in the desert sun and preparing to feed once again.

THE TOWNSFOLK

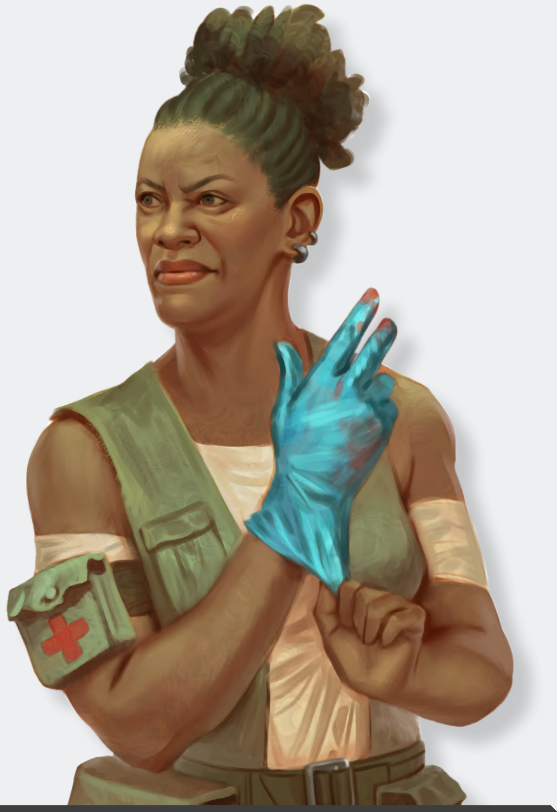
The Travellers will encounter a variety of people at Makintown, most of whom can use the Callian details here. The typical native of Callia is a mixed-blood human with a rather parochial worldview. These are no-nonsense townsfolk who have rarely been affected by wider events in the cosmos and are generally more concerned with their own problems such as water availability. In such a small community, status and respectability are important; the Callians respect hard work and not causing problems for other people rather than placing value on big dreams and ambitions. Indeed, they come over as rather lacking in imagination. This is largely since their world is small, local and harsh. The Callians are compassionate and friendly but not tolerant of stupidity. In their environment, stupid gets other people killed.

CALLIANS

SPECIES	GENDER	AGE
Human	—	—

TRAITS			—	SKILLS
STR	8	INT	6	Athletics (any) 1, Drive (wheel) 1, Gun Combat 0, Profession (farmer or herder) 2, Survival 1
DEX	6	EDU	4	
END	9	SOC	5	

WEAPONS:	Shotgun (4D, Bulky), or Rifle (3D, Scope)



AMMEGASH VENDEN

SPECIES	GENDER	AGE
Human	Female	42

TRAITS			—	SKILLS
STR	5	INT	9	Drive (wheel) 1, Gun Combat 0, Medic 1, Profession (herder) 2
DEX	7	EDU	7	
END	8	SOC	7	

WEAPONS:	Rifle (3D, Scope)
EQUIPMENT:	Auto-Diagnosis Unit

AMMEGASH VENDEN

Ammegash Venden is the town's medic. Like many small towns on Callia there is no actual doctor and certainly nothing like a proper hospital. Instead the town relies on the services of a middle-aged Barix herder who attended a training programme a few years back. Ammegash is entirely competent at treating farm-related injuries and also helps out as a vet of sorts. Disease is not common and is normally diagnosed with the help of an automated system issued to graduates of the course. She is worried about the situation, especially since obvious violence occurred to one of the offworlders and nobody seems to know about it.

When the Travellers first encounter Ammegash, she is nervously moving around the town looking for clues. She does not know who to trust and is suspicious of new arrivals for obvious reasons. If the Travellers approach her she will try to act natural but it will be apparent she is scared. Ammegash will point out the bloodstains by the bridge and tell the Travellers nobody seems to know what happened here. In fact, everyone living nearby will say the same thing – they have no idea anything happened at all and it must be some mundane occurrence. If the Travellers want to investigate this they will get the same answers Ammegash did, possibly in a more tetchy tone since they are outsiders nosing around when folks are busy.

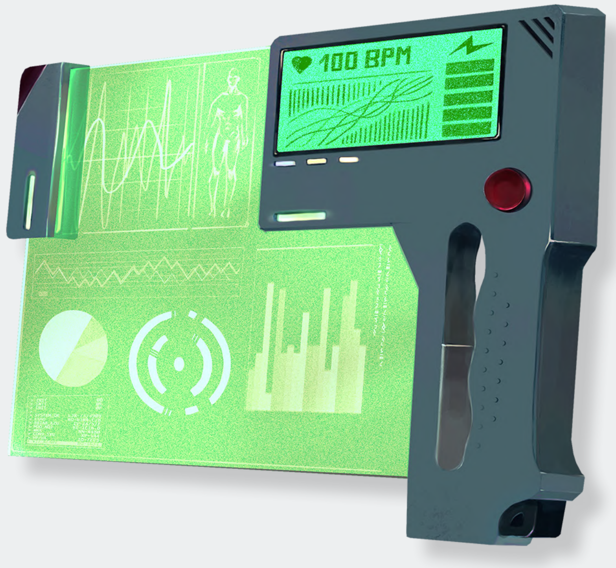
Assuming the Travellers treat Ammegash with courtesy, she may ask for their help. She is a small-town medic, skilled at removing splinters and setting fractured limbs, and has no psychology training. She has a patient who is clearly delusional and would appreciate the assistance of anyone who has relevant experience. The patient is one Edkiku Lam, a nice young man who makes his living doing contract work for others – herding, mending fences, whatever is paying that day.

Ammegash was born in Bekk, on Callia, and moved to Makintown after meeting a handsome young farmer who was visiting to conduct business. They settled in his hometown and had a good life until he was killed in an accident a few years ago. Ammegash decided to train as a medic afterward and today provides caring and useful – although basic – services to her neighbours whilst keeping a particularly quarrelsome herd of Barix from killing one another.

Ammegash is no big-city Medical Examiner; she is a farmer with a medical encyclopaedia and three months' training. Mostly this is enough but she is out of her depth and not liking it at all. If it comes down to it, she will be a loud proponent for hunting and killing G482, and is the type to grab her gun and sort it out herself. However, she is not stupid and will listen to sensible advice from those who might have some idea what is going on.

AUTO-DIAGNOSIS UNIT (ADU)

The ADU is a small, dedicated computer capable of conducting a basic medical examination by way of detachable sensor units. It can detect a wide range of medical conditions with high accuracy and will recommend treatment or referral. Instructions tend to be rather general, advising to stop the bleeding and treat for shock rather than explaining specifically *how* to control the bleed. Likewise, treatments use commonly available drugs and are rather basic, with anything serious triggering a referral notice. Essentially, the device tells its user what is likely to be wrong and what level of response should be made, ranging from first-aid to quarantine and contacting the nearest epidemiology centre.

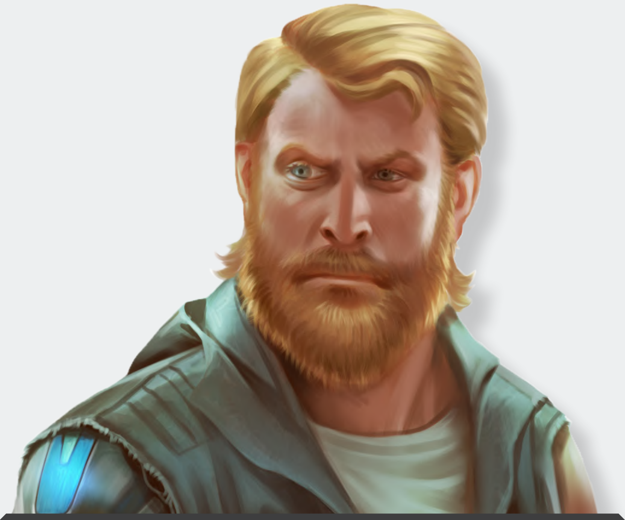


Item	TL	Kg	Cost
Auto-Diagnosis Unit (ADU)	11	0.4	Cr7500

EDKIKU LAM

Edkiku can be found at his house. He will absolutely refuse to go anywhere with Ammegash or acknowledge anything is wrong, and will be encountered weeding his vegetable patch or engaged in some other mundane activity. There is nothing to indicate he is in any way troubled, as he is not. Nor is he receptive to intrusions as he is very busy. The Travellers may note that his excuses change – he must go and fix a fence for someone, or he has been asked to round up some animals, clean an irrigation ditch, or whatever. He does not know he is changing his story nor that anything has happened and will be genuinely frightened by aggressive Travellers.

Edkiku has, according to Ammegash or others who know him, been married for two years. He and his wife have a child who is close to her first birthday. Yet according to Edkiku he has never been married; there was a girl but she left him to go offworld with a passing trader. If the Travellers bodily drag him into his house and show him his wife's possessions or the child's room he looks distraught for a few seconds then states that what is blatantly a child's nursery is a guest room.



EDKIKU LAM

SPECIES	GENDER	AGE
—	Male	40

TRAITS			—	SKILLS
STR	9	INT	7	Athletics (Endurance) 1, Mechanic 2, Survival 1
DEX	7	EDU	5	
END	9	SOC	5	
WEAPONS:	Something blunt and heavy (2D)			

He has absolutely no memory of his family and wants to know if the clothes in his wife's wardrobe were put there by the Travellers as part of some weird prank.

In fact, Edkiku's family fell victim to G482. Whilst he was busy his wife took the baby with her to run errands. They came across the creature near the south end of town. They fled as best they could but were caught in the fields. G482 devoured both within sight of a number of workers, most of whom cannot remember anything happening – or the existence of mother and child. If the Travellers go to investigate they will find the workers – all except one – going about their business. The grisly remains are in the middle of a field but all anyone remembers is that something spooked the animals. Everything is now under control.

Edkiku Lam is entirely unaware anything has happened. He is just an ordinary person going about his business and cannot fathom why the Travellers are interested in him. His story might change but he is not lying – he genuinely believes the reality he has created to replace his lost wife and daughter.

WORSE THAN DEATH?

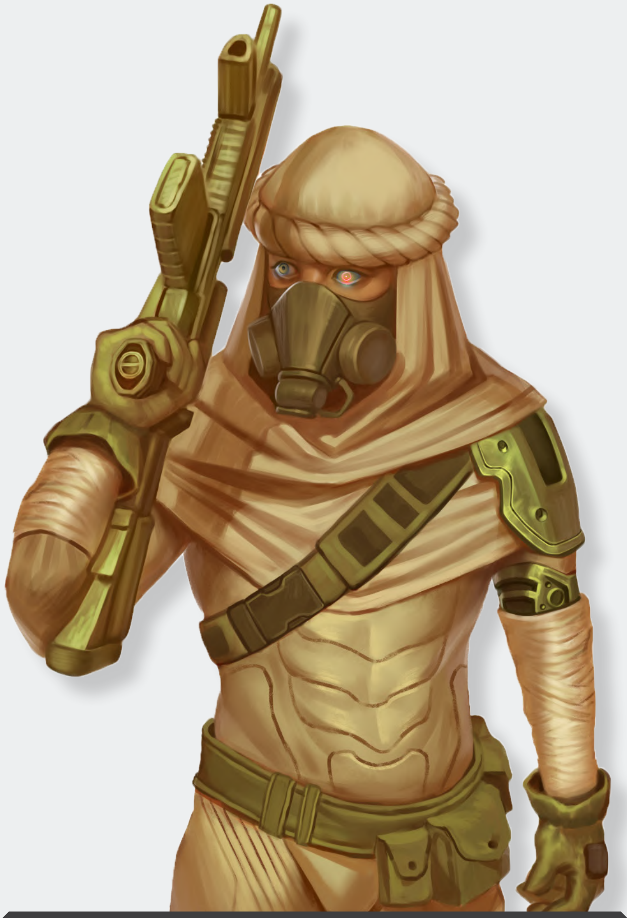
Perhaps the worst thing about G482 is that it does not just kill people; it erases them. It may be that the Travellers will be motivated by a need to destroy this creature in order to protect others – or their own memories. They may also come to understand more about the arrogance of the Ancients. The horrific fate G482 inflicts upon survivors is without malice; it is merely a by-product of a useful expedient.

There are those who would argue that this is the worst form of evil; to cause harm not from hatred or malice but in pursuit of an unrelated goal. G482 is not sentient but the people who made it were. They knew what effect it would have and did not care so long as they got what they wanted. Perhaps this might lead to an insight into the dangers of the Ancients. What if they were to return? Would they clear pests like human populations out of the way just because they might be slightly inconvenient? Would they care at all about the suffering that might be caused?

This is what it is to have the Ancients in proximity. Just as humans would clear an ant's nest that was causing a nuisance, so the Ancients would do with sentient populations. There are those who might take other viewpoints but Travellers who have witnessed events like these are likely to conclude that the peoples of Charted Space are far better off without self-serving, uncaring gods in their backyard.

OTHER VICTIMS AND INVESTIGATORS

The Travellers might find other victims. If so, they are likely to have been killed in houses or dragged out of sight in the riverbed. The creature is naturally cautious and stealthy, and prefers not to leave obvious evidence of its presence. The Travellers might also encounter people searching for missing loved ones. Once the Travellers realise what is going on they will easily be able to tell those who have seen G482 from those who have not. The latter are worried about someone or suspicious that something is afoot, whilst those who have succumbed to the creature's invisibility effect will be convinced everything is fine and find ways to 'explain' or deny evidence presented to them.



JONKEEREEN HUNTER

SPECIES	GENDER	AGE
—	—	—

TRAITS			—	SKILLS
STR	6	INT	7	Athletics 1, Gun Combat (slug) 1, Recon 2, Stealth 2, Survival 4
DEX	9	EDU	3	
END	9	SOC	4	

WEAPONS: Knife (1D+2), Rifle (3D, Scope)

THE JONKEEREEN

There is a Jonkeereen hunting party in town, or rather camped just downstream. They are on cordial terms with the townsfolk and have brought game and some other items to trade. However, they are aware that something is not right in town and are nervous. They are different to the locals and in difficult times 'different' can come to mean 'victim'. Despite this they will be friendly enough if approached politely and will share what little they know.

If the Jonkeereen are shown corpses or images of them they will be sure – as hunters themselves – that this was an animal attack and not one they can identify. There are no large predators on Callia which would attack a human, successfully or otherwise. The obvious inference is that the creature arrived on the scout ship that landed a few days ago. The Travellers might be surprised to hear low-tech people talk like that but the Jonkeereen are low-tech, not stupid. Indeed, equating the two is rather insulting to them.

The Jonkeereen was unwilling to help look for the creature. They know someone has been killed, and have detected blood in the river. Their primary concern is for their own people, so they plan to withdraw downriver and re-join their extended families near the marsh area. There are five Jonkeereen and six sets of possessions – but they do not seem to realise anyone is missing. In fact, one of their number was killed and dragged into the riverbed shortly before Indi was attacked but they have no memory of him. Extra bedding and possessions are 'spares'.

Even if the half-eaten corpse can be found the Jonkeereen are puzzled about it. The dead man is not one of them, they are sure, but there are no other Jonkeereen bands nearby. Decorations on his clothing are in the style of their group but they have no idea who he is. They will, however, take this stranger home and give him a proper funeral as befits one of their people, even a stranger. The Travellers might be able to imagine the effects when the hunting party arrives back with a casualty and they do not recognise it is the son of their leader.

There are five Jonkeereen in their hunting party, although townsfolk may remember seeing six of them – not that anyone paid much attention; the Jonkeereen come and go whenever they please and never cause any trouble. They are at Makintown to trade and are familiar with many of the locals as regular clients. Although they are formidable hunters, the Jonkeereen are hesitant to become involved with the search for an alien creature. Nature will take its course, more than likely, and their first loyalty is to their own people.

The typical hunter has a rifle, often handed down from grandparents or even older but in perfect condition, and a knife. They are hunters, not warriors, and far more likely to take part in an ambush or trapping drive than a stand-up fight.

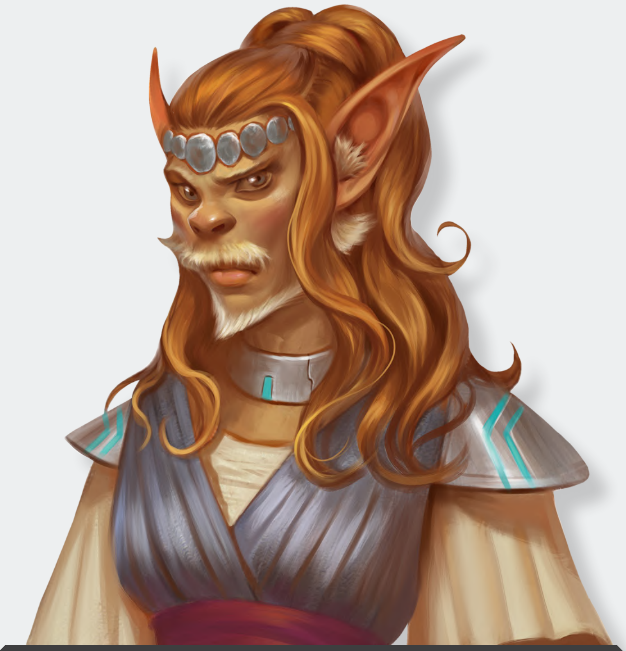
BLANCA'S HOUSE

Blanca's home is much larger than the other houses at Makintown, with a domed roof supporting multiple antennae. The ground floor is almost entirely taken up with a rather sparse but nicely appointed open-plan living area. Here Blanca cooks meals to share with her (few) guests and entertains in style when it suits her. The rest of the time the lower floor provides space to pace around, followed by cameras as Blanca makes one of her famous Ancients-Lore datacasts.

Upstairs has a main and guest bedrooms, a smaller lounge area and an office filled with Ancients-related papers. Another chamber has racks for Blanca's many weapons and lockers for valuable items. Some of these are Ancients-related, although the majority are not functional or are replicas. Among them, hidden in plain sight, is a metallic statuette of a humanoid creature whose proportions are slightly 'off'. It is a bit too tall, with very long fingers and reminiscent of some of the 'Ancient' representations in the Captain of Knowledge's museum. There is also a locked box containing what at first sight seems to be a pile of vacc suit components.

Blanca will be at her home when the Travellers arrive but has her comms system turned off. She learned that the creature is attracted to radio-frequency signals and decided to be cautious. When Bernadatta told her about G482, Blanca went out to see for herself and had a brief encounter with it. She took some holos, which are viewable by anyone immune to the invisibility effect but look like pictures of empty streets to anyone who is affected. Since then she has been trying to research the creature, in between briefly firing up her comms system in vain attempts to contact *Garnette*.

After a good deal of research Blanca has figured out a little about the creature and is not surprisingly concerned. She understands its invisibility effect, in general terms at least, and will try to explain it if she can. Blanca also understands that there is no point trying to warn people. G482's greatest capability is that warnings are irrelevant to people who forget the creature even exists as soon as they see it. Very few of the locals will take her word for it that there is an invisible monster on the loose, so the only answer seems to be for those who can acknowledge its existence to hunt and destroy it. To this end Blanca has been spending considerable time perched in an access hatch next to her comms antenna with her most powerful weapon at hand. It is likely she will be there when the Travellers approach, in which case she will urgently call them to enter her house. Being hailed by a female Aslan with a sniper rifle might be confusing to the Travellers but Blanca is their best hope for some answers.



BLANCA

SPECIES	GENDER	AGE
Aslan	Female	—

TRAITS			—	SKILLS
STR	8	INT	10	Investigate 4, Recon 2, Stealth 2, Survival 3
DEX	5	EDU	11	
END	8	SOC	3	

WEAPONS:	Gauss Sniper Rifle (4D, Scope, AP 5)

Blanca

Blanca is the current identity of an Aslan Ancients Hunter. She wearied of the internal politics of Aslan culture at a young age, crossing into Imperial space to make a new life. A good head for business made her a small fortune on the interstellar stock market and her investment portfolio continues to bring in a solid income. Somewhere along the way she acquired an interest in the Ancients, at first travelling to sites and later acting as a consultant for favoured 'players' like Bernadatta Khaled.

Blanca has been resident on Callia for some years but has stayed below the Imperial authorities' radar thus far. She might have to move on someday but she is happy in the small community of Makintown and well respected by her neighbours. Anyone with meat to sell – from herding or the hunt – finds a ready market with Blanca. She has been known to go hunting with the Jonkeereen and usually makes a good score. The fact that this would scandalise her conventional relatives back home, who see hunting as a purely male preserve, amuses Blanca greatly. The way she sees it, hunting is like business – find the opportunity, go for the kill, take the profit.

As an Aslan, a species not modified by the Ancients, Blanca is immune to the G482 invisibility effect. At the point where the Travellers arrive she is trying to figure out what is going on from the limited information Bernadatta could give her. As the adventure progresses, Blanca will figure out more about the creature and will be able to advise the Travellers. However, her inclination is to get out and blast the thing to atoms rather than make detailed notes from obscure information sources.

Blanca has an extensive collection of weaponry. Most of it is standard, although of good quality. She has hunting rifles and shotguns, carbines and several large-calibre pistols. Her favoured weapon is a gauss sniper rifle which originally belonged to an Imperial Marine Corps sniper – and therefore to the Corps. Possession of this weapon is illegal as it was taken off the sniper's body under 'vague' circumstances. Blanca does not discuss how she came to have it.

Blanca is… what she is. Her home society is extremely sexist and expects a female to be a good wife to a proud male. Certain areas of endeavour are 'male', others 'female' and gender divisions are very strong. No right-thinking male would let his wife or daughter pursue an interest like Ancients Hunting and any achievements she made within acceptable behaviours would reflect upon her clan and husband or father rather than being her own. Blanca found this straitjacket unacceptable and left, making her something of a pariah among mainstream Aslan. The Ancients Hunter community, weird and at times inane as it might be, accepted her for what she knew rather than who she belonged to.

As a result of this background, Blanca is rather prickly about respect and acceptance. Anyone who just accepts that she is here doing what she does has the chance to become a real friend. Those who point out the incongruity will find her rather short-tempered.

Assuming the Travellers can get past this, Blanca will help them tackle G482 and afterward will be a useful source of information and assistance to them. She will not leave her this world unless absolutely unavoidable.

Blanca is a former associate of Mercedes Karamaka (see page 222) and has a set of override codes for *Garnette* – as well she might, since for a time Blanca flew with Mercedes before wearying of all the travel. If the Travellers win her friendship she will turn *Garnette* over to them. Its logs will reset to show them as the current operators, although not the owners. That information remains rather cryptic.

BLANCA AND MERCEDES

The Travellers may not think to ask about *Garnette's* former owners and Blanca will not volunteer information. If they do inquire, Blanca is very willing to talk about Bernadatta and her crew, and has some stories to tell about Sorrel. Questions about the ship before Bernadatta had it are deflected. In truth Blanca does not know all that much about Mercedes' past. All she can offer is '*Garnette* belongs to a very… formidable… human woman called Mercedes. I don't know where she is now but I have no reason to suppose she is not still alive. She handed the ship over to Bernadatta a few years back. Planned to retire I think. Or maybe she just wanted to get rid of that damned book.' She is of course referring to the manuscript of *Twilight's Peak*.

BLANCA'S ARTEFACTS

The Travellers may never see or notice the artefacts Blanca has in her home, or she may guide conversation past them. This is likely unless she has come to trust the Travellers. Alternatively, the Travellers might be gifted with one or both items if Blanca is impressed with them… or they may take items from her home after her unfortunate demise.

The Statuette: Blanca's statuette was recovered from an Ancients site 'somewhere behind the Claw' and seems to represent a modified human. No known variant of Humaniti has the proportions depicted, although some come close. The tall, thin figure is reminiscent of a Jonkeereen, although they are the result of human engineering and cannot be the people depicted. Besides, the head is too narrow, the eyes are too big… this is someone else. Blanca associates the word Yurraka with the statuette but cannot recall where she heard it. She has asked Mercedes Karamakar – who gave it to her – and she has no idea of its origin or the word association either.

Investigation will determine that the statuette is passive; it has no power source of its own. The base could be inserted into a hollow of suitable shape and depth but is wide enough for the object to stand unaided. If it is intended to be positioned as part of a display there is no indication of what other species might be depicted. For the present, the purpose of the statuette remains decorative only.

Vacc Suit Components: The box of components contains a number of obviously non-Ancients items, mostly standard fittings, seals and fasteners of a sort available on the open market. Some of them have been worked into a jury-rigged suit along with items of a presumably-Ancients style. The end result is a light, flexible coverall which is of TL15 origin – in fact it is a standard light suit made by Ling Standard Products – with what appear to be thick shoulder guards and a waist-length cape attached at the shoulders.

The helmet is standard but rather than a backpack life support unit the suit appears to perform all breathing-related functions in the shoulder guards and cape. This is filled with a lightweight gel which apparently stores oxygen, with an incredibly efficient rebreather/scrubber effect taking place in the gel or the shoulder pieces. This would be good for about 30 hours of moderate activity before the gel began to deplete. The suit regains its oxygenation simply by being left in a breathable environment. If there is oxygen available, for example in an unbreathable carbon-dioxide atmosphere, the suit is able to draw it in through the cape's surface. This can extend the suit's endurance by anything from 5% to an indefinite period depending on atmospheric composition.

The suit uses a belt powerpack rather than a backpack. This is clearly adapted from a laser carbine pack and now configured to produce slow but long-duration power rather than blasts of high intensity. In addition to the usual tool holders the belt also has a cylinder of greyish metal which connects into the suit's recycling and heat management systems. Recycling capability is more or less infinite so long as there is power, and heat management is better than a standard vacc suit by a large margin. All damage from heat and cold is reduced by 1D so long as the unit has power. In normal use the converted pack is good for 100 hours of operation – if anyone can stand to be in a suit that long.

PLAYING OUT THE HUNT

When the Travellers arrive on Callia they are expecting to find a ship crew and talk to them. They will gradually realise something is wrong and their goals will shift to finding out what, then learning the specifics and finally eliminating the threat. It is likely the process will begin with entry into *Garnette's* cargo area but unless the Travellers have good intrusion skills they will not be able to progress further through the ship until they have obtained the access codes. These can be found in Bernadatta's personal comm, which is still on her body, or Blanca can provide them.

Progressing into the town, the Travellers will start finding bodies and may be puzzled at the reactions of nearby people. This may result in false suspicions and possibly confrontation, but sooner or later they will realise the victims were not killed by humans or other tool-using people. Talking to the town medic or the Jonkeereen might shed some light on what is happening but the invisibility effect will probably cause further confusion.

The creature is active at this time and it is possible the Travellers will have a distant encounter with it. This means that some of them may be immune or throw off the conditioning to not 'see' it, either temporarily or permanently. If some Travellers can see it and others are sure it does not exist, they may come to the conclusion something is causing a weird effect – perhaps the jewel Sorrell sent them. It may even be that some Travellers detect an imminent attack and open fire, whilst the others cannot perceive the creature at all. If so, their subconscious will invent a reason for the gunfire, perhaps leading to a tragedy or wild goose chase.

Ultimately, the Travellers will encounter Blanca and obtain some kind of explanation about what is going on. Exactly how much she can tell the Travellers is up to the Referee. Very proactive groups will figure it out for themselves, whilst others may need a more direct explanation and a suggestion for how to proceed. What is always true is that the Travellers need to deal with the threat, although how they do so is as always up to them. One good option is a deliberate 'inoculation' against the invisibility effect, until it is no longer effective. This means getting somewhere safe(ish) like a rooftop and watching for the creature. Someone who can see it could point it out, enabling others to make a check to defeat the effect. Those who have them will find that psi shields – natural and artificial – make no difference in this case.

Once the creature can be seen, it can be fought. The Travellers might just chase the screams, or sit and wait for it to move into a kill zone. This is rather callous, as most of the townsfolk cannot see the creature and will be easy victims. Alternatively, the Travellers might set up a trap or a hunt, or might try to enlist some assistance. Blanca will help, although she prefers to stay in or close to her home and if the Jonkeereen can be convinced of the creature's existence they will agree to hunt it. They are great hunters and going up against an invisible killing machine sounds like a real challenge.

Convincing the Jonkeereen that this is their fight could be approached in various ways. Some might be swayed by appeals to ego or desire for recognition. Others can be convinced that this is the best way to protect their people as well as their friends in Makintown. Those less fond of the Makintowners might still be willing to help, if only to prove the Jonkeereen are superior. Locals might also be co-opted, some from a desire for vengeance and some for other motives.

The easiest way to deal with the creature would be to lure it into a kill zone with multiple shooters on the rooftops. There are numerous hunting rifles and shotguns in the town and enough firepower will kill the creature. It could also be driven using firearms into some kind of containment or trap, although this is more risky. If the Travellers are having it too easy, they might encounter problems in the form of oblivious townsfolk wandering into the kill zone or thinking they are the ones being attacked.

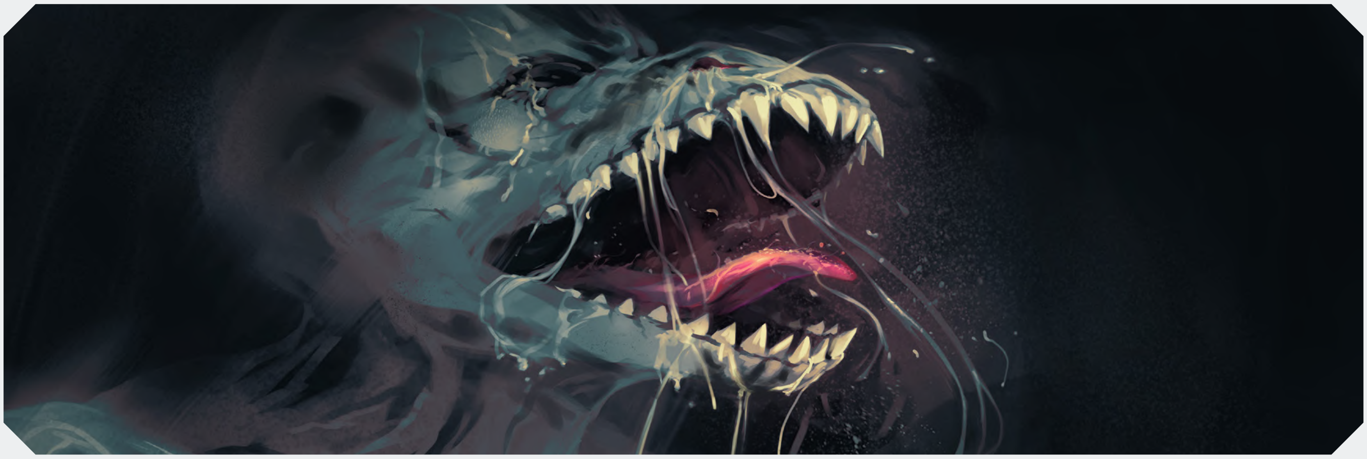
VICTORY AND AFTERMATH

However they do it, the Travellers should be able to eliminate the threat to Makintown. Blanca, if she survives, will provide what information she can. She is sure that G482 is an Ancients creation and will talk about the uncaring nature of the Ancients. She compares them to callous gods, who use 'mere' mortals like Aslan and humans as tools then discard them.

Blanca will insist on holding a funeral for her friends and afterward will give the Travellers the codes to *Garnette*. She does not want the ship, not filled with all those memories, but urges the Travellers to 'be respectful and give her back to the owner when the time is right'. They may well decide to leave the scout ship where it is for now; that is acceptable to Blanca. However, they cannot legally sell *Garnette* as they have use of the ship, not ownership. Attempts to sell will be blocked if they are made openly and in any case word will get back to Mercedes Karamaka sooner or later. This may trigger an early encounter with her and it will not be a friendly one.

In the meantime, the Travellers can learn from *Garnette's* logs that Sorrell has 'gone to Hell' and with a few further inquiries this is clarified. Sorrel is at the Fuller Experimental Mining Installation in the Caledonia system. She said they had found something and she was scared, so she will be hoping for extraction as soon as possible. If this is not motivation enough, the Travellers might also get some answers about the jewel or whatever Bernadatta was investigating.

Caledonia is four parsecs from Callia; two jumps for a jump-2 ship. One option might be to use *Garnette* to go there, keeping the Travellers' own ship – if they have one – off the authorities' radar. However they go about it, answers to the Travellers' questions must lie in the Caledonia system.

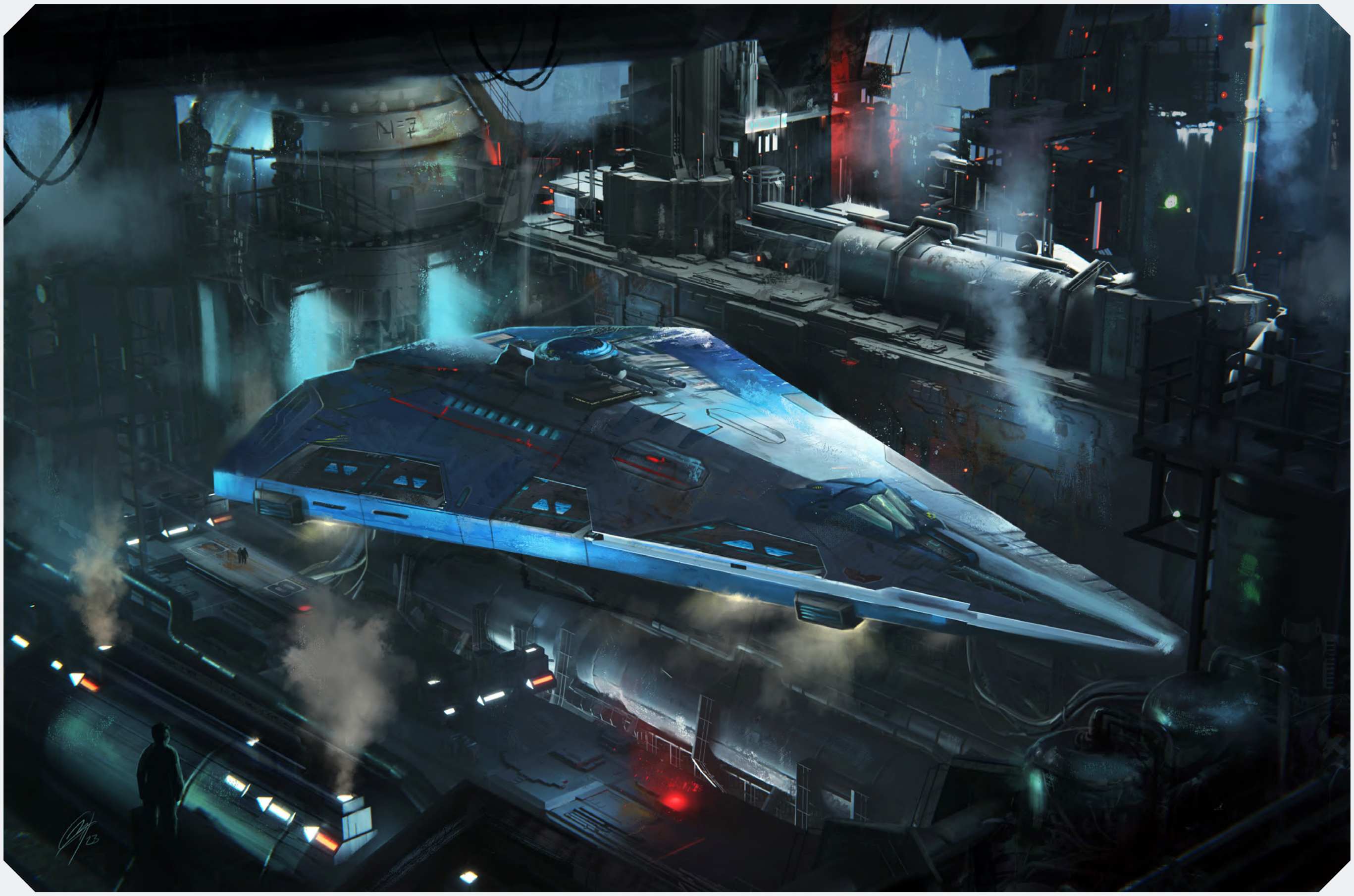


A BLATANT LIE

It may be that the Travellers search *Garnette* once then forget about it. If they have a ship of their own and do not need a scout/courier their only interest might be in trying to sell it, which will lead to disappointment. Travellers who choose to operate *Garnette* for a while, or who undertake a more thorough investigation, might learn a lot.

The Travellers will not be able to legally sell *Garnette.* They have been given the right to operate it but it continues to belong to someone else. Clever Travellers might find a way around this, perhaps by selling the ship illegally. There will be no shortage of Ancients Hunters and collectors lining up to make offers for the vessel, some of whom will offer ridiculous sums. The Travellers will also become aware of crowdfunding projects or collaborations between groups, all aimed at buying *Garnette.* Bernadatta had to contend with this sort of thing all the time and now it is the Travellers' problem.

The Travellers can monetise *Garnette* in a variety of ways, if they are so inclined. One option is to lease it out to a third party. This is actually legal, although it is an abuse of the gift that will anger both Blanca and Mercedes. There are plenty of Ancients Hunters who will pay for a tour of the ship or a ride in it, and others who will offer cash in return for a look through the ship's logs. The latter is a clue to the importance of this vessel in the Ancients Hunter community – not merely as a status symbol but also as a repository of knowledge. Even just parking the ship somewhere and employing someone to conduct tours of it for a fee will bring in some cash. However, this is a rather cynical and perhaps short-sighted approach. *Garnette* is worth far more in terms of knowledge and discoveries than money.



An initial search of the ship will reveal the obvious, as noted in the description on page 75. Additional information will come to light over time, either as a result of deliberate investigation or in the course of using the ship. However, the first task the Travellers face is rather unpleasant. *Garnette* was home as well as transport for three people who are now deceased. Their personal effects and possessions are stored in their cabins; the wine and fine ingredients in the galley were selected by them. The Travellers must decide what to do about the remnants of three lives. Some groups will simply not care but for others clearing out the ship could be an emotional experience.

If the Travellers spend much time in the ship, either operating it or searching for information, they will keep turning up reminders of the former occupants. Over time, they will learn more about the ship and its previous travels. Some of the information they uncover could be highly significant. The campaign can be completed without the information and items aboard *Garnette* but Travellers who take the time to search properly may find their lives become a bit easier.

STRUCTURAL AND GENERAL

Garnette was extensively rebuilt; that much is obvious. Over time, the Travellers will discover the extent of her wounds. Most of the damage occurred on her port side and from above. The outer hull had to be cut away and replaced, concealing the extent of the injuries *Garnette* suffered. An examination of the struts and supporting members suggests that she received a great deal of laser fire and at least one direct hit from a missile. This detonated after partially penetrating the upper surface, distorting the turret ring and some of the surrounding structural members. Replacements were fitted but *Garnette* no longer mounts a turret and with good reason. Irregularities in her frame mean that traverse is slow and uneven. Anyone trying to hit a target with a turreted weapon would suffer DM-2 unless they simply locked the turret and aimed by turning the ship. This has not been a problem to date, since *Garnette* does not carry weapons. Instead, her turret has been replaced with a similarly shaped dome of hull metal which contains additional antennae for her sensor systems.

The structural damage is not sufficient to pose a hazard to the ship but she has several doors that stick and uneven sections of deck. Control pathways and utilities such as air and water ducting embedded in the hull were destroyed and in some cases replaced in an eccentric manner. There are a few sections of exposed ducting or wiring, which have in some cases been covered by decorative items or panels created in the ship's workshop. Overall, however, the repairs were conducted in an effective manner and *Garnette* is quite capable of passing a spaceworthiness inspection.

Some of the decorative items covering sections of wiring have been cleverly contrived to conceal small items. Two have hidden guns – both small autopistols with a single magazine – in case of a hijack attempt or some similar occurrence. Another has a collection of data chips containing encrypted information. It will take some time to crack them without the right decryption keys.

ELECTRONICS AND AVIONICS

The ship's electronic systems were extensively overhauled during her repairs and have since been modified. In addition to the standard systems found aboard all scout/couriers – which work fine – there are some additional pieces of equipment. The first is an expanded communications array. The addition of extra antennae and processing equipment, located where the turret would normally be, has hardened the ship's comms and sensors, enabling them to punch through interference such as that caused by ionising radiation. DM+1 applies to all sensor and comms checks where this is relevant.

Buried deep within the avionics fit is an innocuous looking black box. Investigation shows it has been wired into the guidance and communications system in a distinctly non-standard manner. The box is permanently sealed and would have to be cut away to get at the contents. It could easily be replaced of course but unless the Travellers want to risk this they will have to be content with scans. These show only an irregularly shaped mass of very dense material, of unknown composition, with wiring connectors fused to it. There is a large and very mundane on/off switch between the box and the ship's systems. It is set to *OFF*.

The device is actually an Ancients artefact salvaged long ago from the base at Twilight's Peak. Its full function was never properly discerned but Mercedes did learn that it functions as a transponder of sorts. When switched on the device communicates with Ancients facilities and grants access to their landing areas. It also responds to 'friend or foe' interrogation by the defences and – thus far at least – has prevented automated defences from attacking the ship. This of course requires the device to be switched on. Leaving it on produces the occasional 'interaction' with the ship's electronics. This usually manifests as erratic drive performance or mathematical errors in systems where calculations have to be performed. Since these include guidance, jump drive operations and pretty much everything else, life can get a bit too interesting if the device is left on all the time.

The device, not surprisingly, does not appear on any schematics. It might be found on a physical search or if the Travellers are investigating power drains. There are a few of those, mainly due to the repaired electronics. An attempt to trace or eliminate them will turn up the mysterious box. However, most people familiar with old starships are likely to conclude that the drains are within tolerance and only to be expected. This is one reason *Garnette's* secret has not been discovered during maintenance.

COMPUTERS AND DATA

The ship's main computer and all her data storage was entirely replaced during her repairs, meaning there is no record of her activities as *Baleveny.* However, her very first log entry records that she has been re-registered as *Garnette* and lists her old name. This is the only reference in the logs. Since then, *Garnette* has kept standard logs of her movements. A detailed investigation into the logs will reveal a pattern of movement across Glisten and District 268, which could be cross-referenced with known Ancients sites and the location of Hunter groups.

Notably, *Garnette* has paid several visits to a small town on Pagaton, sometimes staying for several weeks. This happened before and after her most recent crew took over but like most of the logs there is no explanation for the stay. She has also visited Callia several times as well as Egypt and other worlds in the region. A lengthy foray into the Trojan Reach followed the change of operators, during which the ship seems to have spent a considerable amount of time in the outsystem of backwater worlds. There are also a couple of puzzling movements, where *Garnette* seems to have travelled between systems without engaging her jump drive. Jumps are normally logged, with a file of drive and system parameters associated with each. Either *Garnette* was carried aboard another ship during these movements or she travelled by some mysterious means.

The ship's computer also contains decryption keys for the data chips the Travellers might have found. The keys are not hidden as such but are saved under innocuous names with no clues about their function. A detailed investigation into the ship's data and operating systems will turn up a great deal of clutter, which is normal. The keys are hidden in plain sight; apparently just another batch of orphaned data or a fragment of programming that is no longer needed.

Decrypting the data chips will take a while but yields a great deal of information in a rather raw form. There are files on all manner of subjects, most of which are apparently useless or irrelevant:

- Weather patterns on various worlds, all of which are identified only by a code-name Bernadatta assigned. She knew which was what and never recorded what applied to which world.
- Endless jump drive parameters, some from *Garnette* and some from other vessels. One of those is much, much larger than a scout/courier; a high-jump cruiser perhaps.
- Fragmentary notes on something called Omicron Division, noting 'sightings' in the Glisten, Aster and Trexalon systems. There is no indication if these are ship or person sightings.
- Notes on 'Project Gaaadam'. Gaaadam is an obscure Vilani word which translates as 'so old it has lost any meaning' which is not very enlightening. Project Gaaadam seems to be a private initiative dedicated to tracking individuals of interest. These are not identified by their actual names in the file but by unhelpful labels such as 'Weird Accent Guy' and 'Notsusatall'.
- Notes on known Ancients artefacts and what they are presumed to do. In many cases there is nothing more than a physical description and UNKNOWN in big red letters under 'function'.

Consulting these records and doing some cross-referencing is worth DM+1 on Investigate checks when trying to figure out something connected with the Ancients. That might be anything from what a device does to drawing correlations between events on distant worlds and known Ancients activities. In addition there are two detailed files which will be of interest to the Travellers. These are presented on page 294.

THE CREW OF GARNETTE

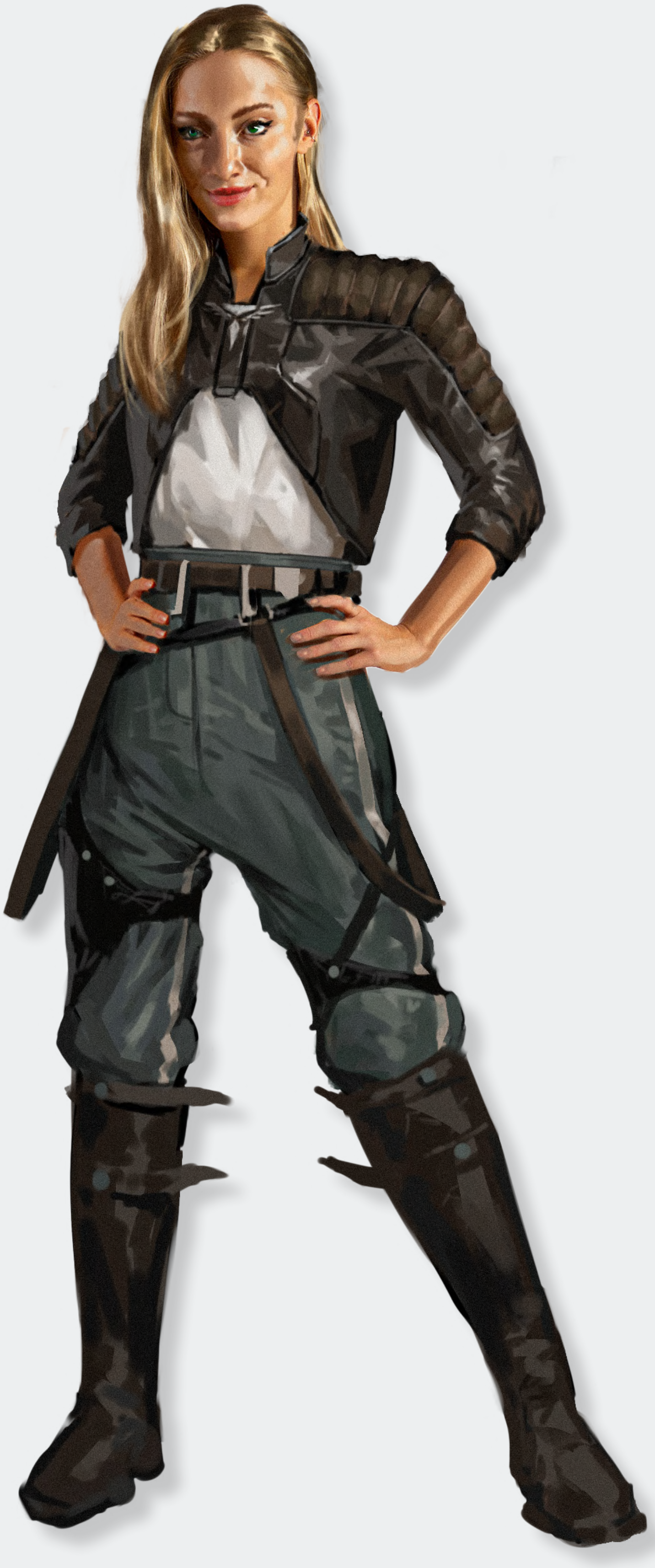
The three crewmembers of *Garnette* are all dead but the Travellers might come to know them from their personal effects and other clues left behind.

BERNADATTA KHALED (CAPTAIN)

Bernadatta Khaled was born somewhere in the Solomani Confederation, to a pureblood Solomani family. Her early career was unremarkable; university education followed by an administrative role in the family business. In time she might have taken over the firm from her parents and continued her comfortable life. Instead she suddenly inherited the business when both parents were killed when the liner *Mooltan* suffered a catastrophic reactor failure. The subsequent inquiry found serious misconduct among the operators, leading to large compensation payouts.

No longer having any desire to be a business magnate, Bernadatta decided to sell the firm and travel. Her first ship was a small merchant converted into a sort of yacht and in it she wandered across Solomani space. Bernadatta visited the Hive Federation and Aslan Hierate, and somewhere along the way began to collect associates. Their common interest was mysteries and sooner or later they began to focus on the biggest mystery of modern times – what happened to the Ancients and might they come back?

The yacht was sold and replaced with a vessel more suitable for Bernadatta's new purpose, and this in turn was replaced when a friend suddenly offered the near-legendary *Garnette* at an extremely low price. Bernadatta never knew this was Mercedes Karamaka's current identity. She planned to settle down for the foreseeable future and effectively passed the torch to Bernadatta. Although she did not ever tell Bernadatta about Twilight's Peak directly, she did leave clues.



At that time Mercedes was weary and wanted to rest for a few years but not indefinitely. Handing *Garnette* to Bernadatta was a sort of insurance policy against complacency. One day, Mercedes assumed, Bernadatta would figure it out and find her. That would be the sign it was time to begin again or quit for good. She would tell her friend about the adventure at Twilight's Peak or go back there with her. This will never be, of course, since Bernadatta is dead, but perhaps others will find the clues.

Bernadatta was the ship's owner-aboard but was not a skilled crewmember. This meant she handled the 'facilitation' tasks such as acting as a steward or assisting the others as an extra pair of eyes or hands when needed. She was learning to operate sensors and communications systems but her role in the team – as well as being its undisputed leader – was to handle everything outside the ship. Brokerage, finding contacts, investigating finds and the like were Bernadatta's preserve whilst the others handled matters like getting her where she wanted to go.

Bernadatta did not routinely carry a weapon, drawing a snub pistol from the armoury when she felt the need. Her cabin is extremely neat – unlike the 'madness room' – and contains few personal effects. Bernadatta had an extensive wardrobe, which spills out into the spare cabin, ranging from business attire and formal dress to bush and working clothes. Some of the outfits could be considered disguises and are accompanied by items that can be used to change appearance such as wigs and minor prosthetics.

KNANTOG KAEZTERR (PILOT/ASTROGATOR)

Knantog, who normally went by the Galanglicised name 'Nanto', was a Vargr born on Rhylanor to a family who had been Imperial citizens for generations. He learned his trade in the small merchant ship sector, eventually becoming bored and leaving in search of something more interesting. Bernadatta hired him as a pilot/astrogator for her newly acquired ship and he has been with her ever since. Nanto was never an Ancients Hunter, just a pilot who liked visiting unusual places and seeing the wonders of the galaxy. His favoured weapon was a 'coach gun', a shortened double-barrel shotgun with a full stock. Its very lack of sophistication pleased Nanto as much as its ability to intimidate potential aggressors.

INDI DAI (ENGINEER)

Indi Dai was a human of indeterminate origins. She was an Ancients Hunter first and an engineer second, although she was competent enough for Bernadatta's approval. Indi studied shipboard engineering at university, expecting a career in merchant spacing but veered off her intended career path when she met Bernadatta. She was very young to be in sole charge of a starship's drives. Indi did not typically carry a weapon, following Bernadatta's lead on when caution was the best course of action. She never really had time to develop as a person; had she survived she might have become a legendary Ancients Hunter in her own right.

RESEARCHING *BALEVENY*

Researching the *Baleveny* reveals that this was the semi-official 'working name' of a vessel operated by the Imperial Interstellar Scout Service, which often assigns only code designations to its smaller vessels. The ship's service was long and mostly rather humdrum but in 973 she received a refit to undertake communications courier duty in District 268. *Baleveny* was under the command of Senior Scout Banni Seliar from mid-978.

Baleveny was posted missing, presumed lost, soon after the beginning of the Third Frontier War. She reappeared, in heavily damaged state, in 998. Determined to be legitimate salvage and beyond economic repair, she was bought by the salvage company – a now-defunct one-ship outfit named Carix Salvage LIC, registered out of Mertractor in District 268. After extensive repairs she was re-registered as *Garnette* and sold to an unknown private operator.

What an investigation will not reveal is that the vessel was salvaged by a company set up for that purpose by Mercedes Karamaka. Carix Salvage ran for 12 years to establish its legitimacy and went under like so many small businesses. Its company records are still held on Mertractor and a detailed analysis will show that the firm was owned by Mercedes and its demise, whilst natural looking, was clearly avoidable. The truth is that Mercedes Karamaka set up a company to get the ship, sold it to herself under an assumed name, and operated it for several years before passing *Garnette* to the first of her favoured friends. She reclaimed the ship and used it under various aliases over the years before finally granting it to Bernadatta. All this makes it plain that Mercedes Karamaka is well over a century old and has a long connection with the vessel. However, this will probably become apparent in other ways before the Travellers think to investigate.

HELL AT PERIHELION

Hell at Perihelion takes place in the Caledonia system, in the Glisten subsector of the Spinward Marches. The Travellers may be under the impression their friend Sorrel is on Caledonia but will soon discover that the Fuller Experimental Mining Installation is in fact on Calefaction, an inner planet of the system. Worse, it is on the current 'bright face' and only accessible by way of a dangerous overland transit. When they arrive the Travellers discover that something is definitely awry. Some of the researchers are dead, some have fled and nobody seems to have a straight answer for anything. The Travellers discover that the entire planet is about to crack apart and their friend Sorrel is responsible.

The first part of this adventure involves getting to Calefaction, a world in the Caledonia system where the adventure takes place, and reaching the research station. This is an opportunity for scene-setting and to show the Travellers the wonders of the universe. The approach to Calefaction and landing at the world's spaceport are made under unusual circumstances, after which the Travellers need to make a surface transit to their final destination.

It is not possible to simply fly directly to the Fuller Experimental Mining Installation in a starship or grav vehicle due to the conditions on Calefaction. The transit is arduous but not overwhelmingly dangerous if the Travellers are careful. Once at the station, a certain amount of detective work will reveal what is happening there – and perhaps why. At some point, the Travellers will trigger the enmity of their contact, Sorrel, whom they thought wanted rescue. In fact she did at the time her message was sent but since then her viewpoint has changed rather dramatically. As wider events begin to unfold, the Travellers will need to decide whether to flee or try to help.

There are physical problems to solve and interactions with people who are not… quite right. Combat is likely in the latter stages of the adventure, although the Travellers might find a way to circumvent their problems without violence. Quick decisions are necessary during the last stages of the adventure, along with focus on the goal at hand. If the Travellers become distracted by a desire to eliminate all the opposition rather than attaining their goal they might fail utterly.

Throughout the whole adventure, the Referee should be mindful of the setting. The installation is on a planet utterly inimical to humans and other sophonts, and the environment is a hazard throughout. Indeed, it might be the height of hubris and folly to even come to such a place and to fight one's own kind there is a whole new level of crazy. Yet the situation exists and the Travellers will have to find a way to resolve it.

The main part of the adventure can be tailored to different groups of Travellers. Some may prefer to bull their way through, blasting security robots as they go. Others might use stealth and trickery to achieve the same goal. How difficult the Travellers find it to get into the installation security system and obtain information should be judged carefully. Some groups are highly proactive and will figure out a plan to get what they need; others need a clear path laid out for them.

None of the survivors is 'quite right' as a result of their circumstances. This, and the fact that none of them has the whole picture, means they cannot provide a simple explanation of everything the Travellers need to know. This might lead suspicious Travellers to think that the researcher is hiding something… which may or may not be the case. Ideally, the main part of the adventure should take the form of an investigation-under-fire, with the Travellers unable to be sure who to trust. The ending of the adventure may provoke more questions than it answers. Investigating these will eventually lead the Travellers to Twilight's Peak.

SORREL'S ENDEAVOUR

Sorrel took a job at the Fuller Installation to investigate rumours that the staff had 'found something' in the course of their work. She befriended the chief space scientist who seemed to know more than he should. Eventually she was let in on the secret – some of the researchers had found what they thought to be Ancients artefacts. However, there was more to it than that; there were mysterious metallic 'rods' extending down into the planetary crust.

Sorrel became increasingly paranoid over time, as did some of the other researchers. This was a side-effect of the jewels the researchers had found. At the time Sorrel sent for the Travellers she was worried and a bit frightened but also intrigued by what might be discovered. She poured her energy into researching the rods and jewels, volunteering for every hazardous trip outside. This attracted approval but eventually she began to descend into lucid madness. The break came when the senior space scientist let her in on the real secret. Ancients bits and pieces were one thing but paled into insignificance compared to the glory of Calefaction's star. He showed Sorrel the shrine he and some of the other researchers were using and invited her to attend a ceremony.

This was a revelation to Sorrel. In her altered mental state she felt the glory of the star pour into her. She, unworthy mortal, was almost close enough to touch a god – and the god was dying. Her fellow worshippers were alarmed by her sudden zeal and endless questions about how the god could be brought back to life. What sacrifice would rekindle the dying heart of a star? They said nothing to the others, fearing ridicule.

What the little cult did not understand was that they had 'got religion' as a combination of the jewels' effects on their minds and the impressive presence of the giant star overhead. They were lucid and rational but they Believed. Capital B. For most of them this was positive and comforting, and made no difference to their lives or work. They might join a formal church when they left but there was nothing particularly significant about their sudden religious fervour. There were hundreds of faiths in Imperial space and adherents of the Church of Stellar Divinity could be encountered almost anywhere. They thought Sorrel was like them – a new and fervent convert to a positive and welcoming religion. The truth was rather different.

As Sorrel's message meandered its way to the Travellers, she became obsessed with finding a suitable sacrifice to her star-god. Experimentation with the jewels suddenly showed her the way. The rods could be made to operate in harmony with one another, dissipating heat and strengthening the surrounding bedrock. This might have been what the Ancients were experimenting with. Sorrel could not know but it did not matter to her because she had realised the rods could do the opposite. Pulsing together at the right frequency they could send shockwaves down into the core of Calefaction at the moment external stresses were greatest. Carefully worded queries to the planetary scientists suggested a breakup could perhaps be triggered.

So Sorrel quietly set about her great endeavour, forgetting she had sent for friends to extract her. Now she was focused on one goal only; to calibrate the rods ready for perihelion, the point at which the planet would be closest to the star in its orbit. At that moment she would activate them, tearing Calefaction apart as a sacrifice to her god. Sorrel is no different now to previously in terms of personality but this is her mission and she believes with all her soul that it must be carried out.

To this end, Sorrel has been visiting the rods and making alterations to them using the jewels she has. Using them deepens her convictions each time and at some point she became willing to kill in order to prevent interference. She reprogrammed the security robots in case she needed their support and gave herself command-level access to the installation's systems. Her final preparations were underway when disaster struck.

The plan was derailed by the actions of one of the other researchers. Those who had been experimenting with the jewels suffered varying effects. Those prone to leaps of faith became more likely to see religious significance in mundane things; those with a paranoid streak saw plots and machinations. It was one of the latter who sabotaged Sorrel's ATV as she set out on one of her expeditions, stranding her on the bright face. Others realised what he had done and tried to seize him, accidentally triggering the security robots' wayward reprogramming. As the Travellers approach the Fuller Installation, Sorrel is trapped in a dying vehicle. Security robots are stalking the installation itself. The survivors do not suspect the time-bomb under their feet. If they are still alive at perihelion they will be at the epicentre of planetary destruction.

THE CALEDONIA SYSTEM

The Caledonia system is, ultimately, doomed. Its primary is a red giant which has swallowed up the inner planets and will eventually destroy at least some of the remaining bodies. It is orbited by a red dwarf companion and together they provide enough energy to allow a previously barren world to become marginally habitable. These conditions will prevail for millennia, so there is no imminent danger to the remaining worlds – except the innermost. Solar flares can be a problem but the cycle is generally predictable.

The mainworld of the Caledonia system is small and dry, with a thin atmosphere and severe atmospheric taint which can be lethal to most humans and Vargr. This is not immediate but long-term exposure will result in allergic reactions of increasing severity. The population have been subject to a long-term medical programme which results in near-total immunity for anyone whose parents were both born on Caledonia but outsiders need to be careful.

As a result of these conditions and the fact Caledonia is not really on the way to anywhere, the system is something of a backwater. Jump-2 ships to and from Aki and Weiss pass through but there is little other traffic. The local cluster of worlds has little internal trade and as a result ship numbers at the small port are very low. Overall, Caledonia is one of those places where nothing happens and nobody goes.

Most of the income received by the world government takes the form of an operating fee paid by mining corporations operating in the system. Despite the fact that Caledonia cannot enforce offworld territorial claims, Imperial law requires any organisation exploiting the system's resources to pay a fee to the mainworld government. This fee is small, ensuring that Caledonia will never become prosperous enough to launch its own mining operation. Resentment is considerable among the mainworld population at having 'their' mineral resources plundered by outsiders in return for a pittance… but nothing can be done.

Most of the mining takes place in the planetoid belt. There are a couple of permanent stations owned by Sternmetal Horizons, plus numerous semi-temporary facilities set up by smaller companies. Few of the ships involved in these operations or their supporting logistics go anywhere near the mainworld. Likewise, the mineral extraction plants on the outer worlds ship their goods directly to market and receive supplies by way of jump-capable vessels. They do not need to use the planetary port except in an emergency.

There is also activity on the innermost planet of the system. Known as Calefaction, this world may have once been the core of a gas giant. As the system's primary began to swell up into a giant star, its atmosphere burned off leaving the densest materials exposed. Although a highly dangerous environment, Calefaction may offer unique mining opportunities and is being studied to determine if it is likely to break up. Such an event might endanger the rest of the system, creating a great deal of debris. Most would fall into the stars but that still leaves a very large amount of rock fragments being flung about the system by gravitational interactions.

CALEFACTION

The world of Calefaction is in a precarious position. Its inclined and somewhat elliptical orbit takes it dangerously close to the system's primary at perihelion. Thus its name – an archaic word meaning 'to heat up' which happens to also be a pun on the mainworld. Calefaction is at present approaching perihelion, creating extreme conditions, and will begin to cool slightly as it moves past its closest approach. A world in this position would normally be tidally locked but although Calefaction is slowing down as a result of tidal forces it has not yet lost all of its momentum. Its day-night cycle is equivalent to 122 standard days.

One result of this slow rotation is a constant cycle of heating and cooling. The 'cold' side of Calefaction retains some warmth in its surface rocks but is not very different from a typical rockball. The 'bright' side, on the other hand, is subject to extreme conditions. The stresses caused by rapid heating on one side of the planet and the cold of space on the other are affecting Calefaction. In addition, it is subject to tidal forces as a result of its position relative to the smaller companion star. It is not so much a question of if Calefaction is destroyed but when and in what manner. To this end a scientific station was set up some years ago and later its planetary-science mission was expanded to include experimental mining techniques.

Calefaction

UWP: D600217–B

Starport	D	Poor
Size	6	9,600km
Atmosphere	0	None
Hydrosphere	0	0–5%
Population	2	Hundreds
Government Type	1	Company/corporation
Law Level	7	All firearms prohibited
Technology Level	B	Early stellar

Calefaction

System	M4 III Giant M0 V Dwarf 0 Gas Giants — 1 Planetoid Belts — 8 Other Worlds	
Data	C541636–5	
Starport	C	Routine
Size	5	8,000km
Atmosphere	4	Thin; tainted
Hydrosphere	1	10%
Population	6	Millions
Government Type	3	Self-perpetuating oligarchy
Law Level	6	All firearms except shotguns prohibited
Technology Level	5	Industrial

The world's only significant settlement is imaginatively named Shelter Canyon for the geographical feature that protects it. Located close to the south pole, Shelter Canyon lies in a relatively stable region and is shielded by a high ridge as well as the canyon itself. There are drawbacks to this location but it was the only option if the overall mission were to be possible.

Approaching Calefaction is dangerous, exposing vessels to extreme heating and radiation. The usual solution is to use the planet as a shield, which requires a complex course plot, then to run low over the dark surface to the canyon entrance. The settlement can be approached without exposure to intense stellar heating by running the canyon. Alternatively, a vessel can use the more direct method of popping up into direct sunlight for a short time. Both have their risks but are manageable with a robust ship.

Despite these dangerous conditions, Calefaction is the site of an experimental mining operation in addition to its scientific outpost. Designed to take advantage of the unusual conditions, the mines make use of robots and specialist equipment. Personnel shelter in deep installations or operate specially adapted vehicles. In addition to heat, there is a significant radiation hazard which can interfere with some systems. Notably, vehicular gravitic equipment is prone to extreme localised heat generation which can cause malfunctions or even destroy the system. Starship-grade equipment has sufficient mass to absorb and transfer this heat sufficiently to allow its cooling system to cope. Even so, operating on Calefaction will strain any gravitic drive. Short periods of operation are the norm, followed by careful maintenance, and most vehicular activity is on the surface.

Operating on the 'cold face' is not very different from any other rockball. The unusual composition of the world makes extracting high-value materials relatively easy. At any given time there will be small mining expeditions out on the cold face conducting experiments into technique or analysing the world's structure. None is very large; typically around a dozen staff operating robotic mining platforms from a mobile command centre. For the most part ore is stockpiled at the extraction site and directly loaded onto heavily armoured shuttles just before sunrise, by which time the command centre will have returned to a safe location. The heavily armoured ore shuttles rendezvous with a freighter at a safe distance from the giant star.

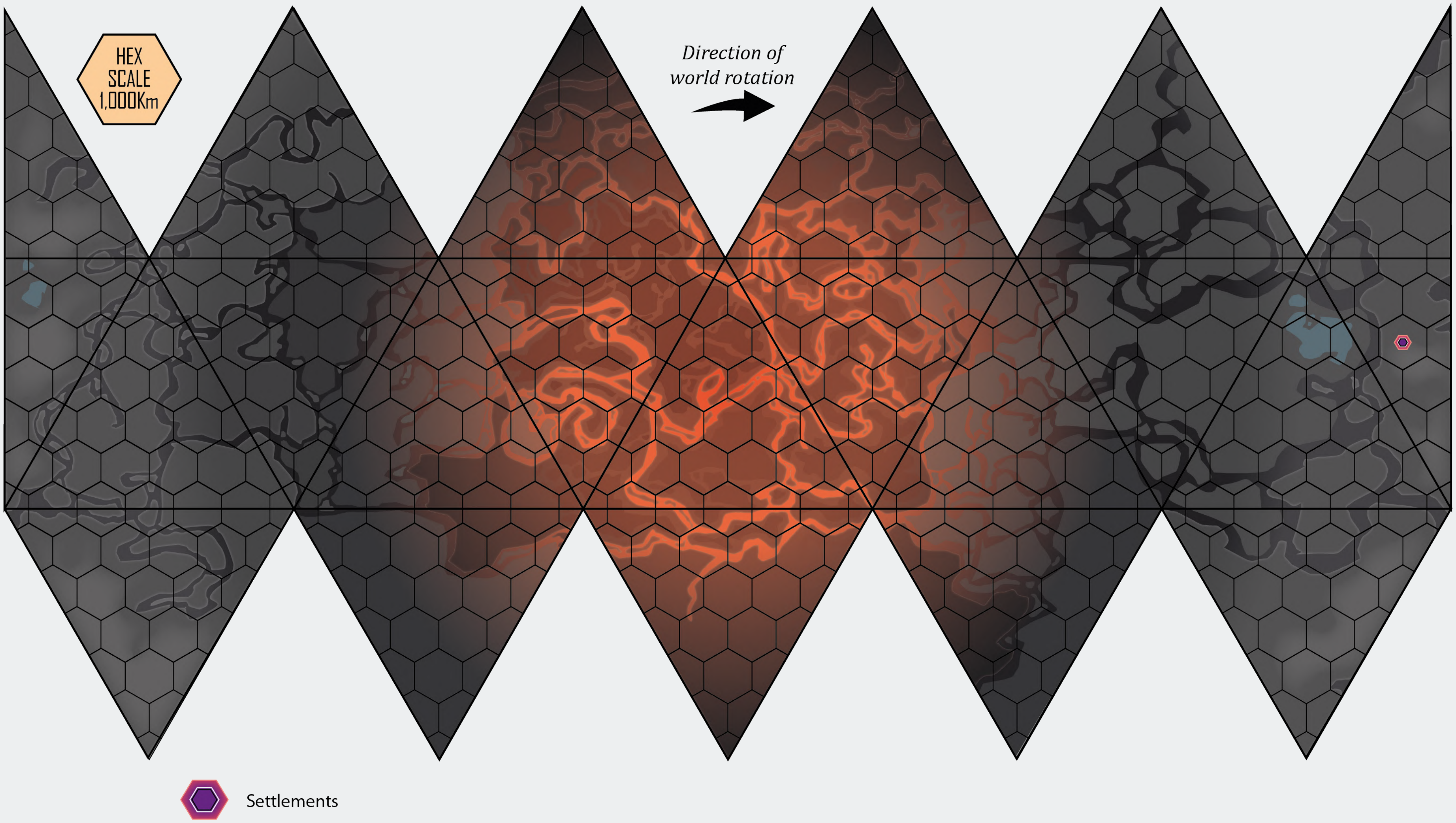
CONDITIONS ON CALEFACTION

The 'hot side' of Calefaction is known as the bright face. Proximity to the giant star means that the bright face covers more than 50% of the planetary surface. This surface, and any object in space close by, receives sufficient stellar radiation to be lethal to anyone operating outside a protected vehicle or starship. The average dose is around 500 rads per hour – equivalent to a significant solar flare – rising to 1,000 or even 1,500 rads per hour in periods of high activity. Starships provide protection to the crew of 500 rads per hour, with radiation shielding increasing this to 1,000 rads per hour. However, even if the crew are not being slowly killed, the ship itself will become irradiated.

In the longer term – in this case a matter of days or even hours depending on stellar activity – a ship will become so irradiated that it is hazardous to the crew even after it has left the system. It will also emit sufficient radiation that anyone outside will be killed

CALEFACTION

UWP: D600217-B


HEX SCALE 1,000Km
Direction of world rotation
Settlements

or suffer long-term harm. Such emissions are easily detected – any Class A or B starport and some Class C installations will note the situation and refuse landing permission – but the Travellers could wipe out a small starport without realising what is happening. De-irradiation is possible at a shipyard or repair facility of TL10+, costing 0.01% of the vessel's value. A lower level of irradiation will quickly dissipate, meaning that if the Travellers are careful not to expose their ship too much direct radiation they can go on their way unhindered but if they choose to ignore the warnings they may end up trapped in a dying, irradiated hulk.

Radiation is not the only problem on and near Calefaction. A vessel exposed to direct starlight will heat up fast but it will take a little time before this is sufficient to start damaging the ship.

In addition to being irradiated and cooked, there is an additional problem. Electromagnetic activity is such that even shielded electronics will struggle. Devices small enough to be hand-carried will at least be overloaded and rendered non-functional. Heavily protected devices such as grossly overbuilt robots can function but communicating with them is problematic. Radio-frequency devices have a range measured in tens of metres and even powerful narrow-beam equipment can only reach a few kilometres. Comms lasers are used where possible, in heavily protected mounts and only for a short period. This can mean searching for a robot with optical cameras until the laser can be aimed quickly. Although primitive, this method does work. However, communicating over long distances is all but impossible. Satellites are not an option so tall towers with comms lasers atop them, coming online for just a few minutes then retreating under cover, provide the only useful means of long-range communications.

STARSHIP HEAT DAMAGE

The Referee will need to keep track of how much heat the ship has absorbed. An unarmoured starship can absorb an amount of heat equal to 10% of its tonnage before suffering damage. Armour increases this threshold by 5% per point of armour. Thus a 400-ton ship with four points of armour can absorb 120 points of heat (10%+20% of 400) before damage occurs.

Once the ship's damage threshold has been reached, hull damage occurs at a rate equal to the heat output of the star. Close proximity to a typical main-sequence star inflicts 1D damage per round. Although Calefaction's primary is huge it is a relatively cool red star, so damage at this distance is 'merely' 2D per round. Heat shielding reduces this damage by half – converting normal dice to D3s.

This assumes normal function of the ship's heat-management system. Heat is shunted from the heated side to radiators on the cooler side of the ship, dissipating at a rate of one point per round. A ship with no functioning heat management system will take much longer to shed the excess energy, whilst a TL12+ ship with heat shielding can shed two points of heat per round. There are ways to increase a vessel's heat-resilience, at least in the short term.

Personnel-scale damage from heat is the same as for ships – people are smaller and have less surface area to absorb heat but they are also less able to cope with it. Thus anyone out of the surface will take 2D damage per round. A reflective covering, such as a silver tarpaulin, reduces this to 2D3. This level of heating will overload a standard vacc suit in moments.

THE SHELTER CANYON REGION

Much of Calefaction is unmapped. The only area that could be said to be properly charted is the flanks of Shelter Canyon. With walls ranging from 500 metres to five kilometres high, the canon begins as a bowl in the Falco Mountains. It is likely this bowl was formed by subsidence resulting from the collapse of a cavern or crust void. The terrain is stable and entry routes are well-mapped. Nevertheless there is always a chance of a rockslide or sinkhole.

FALCO MOUNTAINS (1)

Named for one of the early explorers who charted the range, the Falco Mountains appear to have been created by twisting of the planetary crust. Densitometer measurements are difficult on Calefaction but it appears there is a region of high metal density under the area. This is patchy, perhaps because of interference but possibly due to uneven material distribution.

Several automated boring/extraction units have been set up in the mountain valleys where they are always in shade. The smaller ones are designed to collect deep core samples and are moved periodically, whilst the larger ones are above areas of high material density. These are left for several weeks at a time before a heavily protected shuttle is sent to collect the produce. The output of these automated mining units is not great but the proportion of valuable materials they bring up is high enough to make them viable.

SHELTER CANYON (2)

Shelter Canyon wends its way from the Falco Mountains to its terminus point about 200 kilometres away as the crow flies. The canyon is typically about 100–200 meres wide and in places five kilometres deep. The floor has been smoothed with plasma cutters and in several places there are natural ramps which have been smoothed out to allow access to the surface.

Shelter Canyon provides a safe transit route to the automated mines in the Falco Mountains and a jumping-off point for surface expeditions on the bright and cold faces. It is also used as a transit by spacecraft, which necessitates some precision flying but keeps the craft out of direct sunlight. It is not uncommon for an ATV transiting the canyon to be ‘buzzed’ by a shuttle headed for the settlement.

ASLETT RIDGE (3)

The Aslett Ridge was a major factor in selecting a base site on Calefaction. It is a massive upthrust of highly metallic rock which apparently forced its way to the surface in liquid form before rapidly cooling. The ridge provides shelter when it is on the bright side, allowing multiple extraction units to be set up. Like others on Calefaction these have extremely simple controls and are heavily shielded. They drill into the side of the escarpment rather than down, extracting material which is collected every few days, after which the drill is repositioned if necessary. A deep gap in the ridge separates the main escarpment from a smaller one known as the Fuller Extrusion. In this gap lies one of the smaller installations on Calefaction, the Fuller Experimental Mining Installation. This is the ‘Fuller’ Sorrel was investigating when she called for help.

THE TWO BIG ONES (4)

The Two Big Ones are large impact craters lying close together, surrounded by a cluster of smaller ones. The most significant of these lies between The Big Two and the settlement in Shelter Canyon. It is home to a modest research installation which is simply named Crater. This is the nearest of the three permanent installations outside Shelter Canyon and, as its name suggests, is built in the shade of a large impact crater’s outer wall. Crater is a small monitoring station concerned mainly with observing the system’s primary and drawing correlations between stellar energy output fluctuations and stresses in the planetary crust. Crater is on the current cold face and will not see sunrise for another 100 standard days or so.

LAVA CENTRAL (5)

The smallest and most distant of the crewed installations outside the canyon is known as Lava Central. It is a laboratory and scientific site constructed close to a set of lava vents on the current hot side. The scientists based there are interested in the composition of the liquid rock coming up from the planet’s interior; notably its high heavy-metal content.

FULLER EXPERIMENTAL MINING INSTALLATION (6)

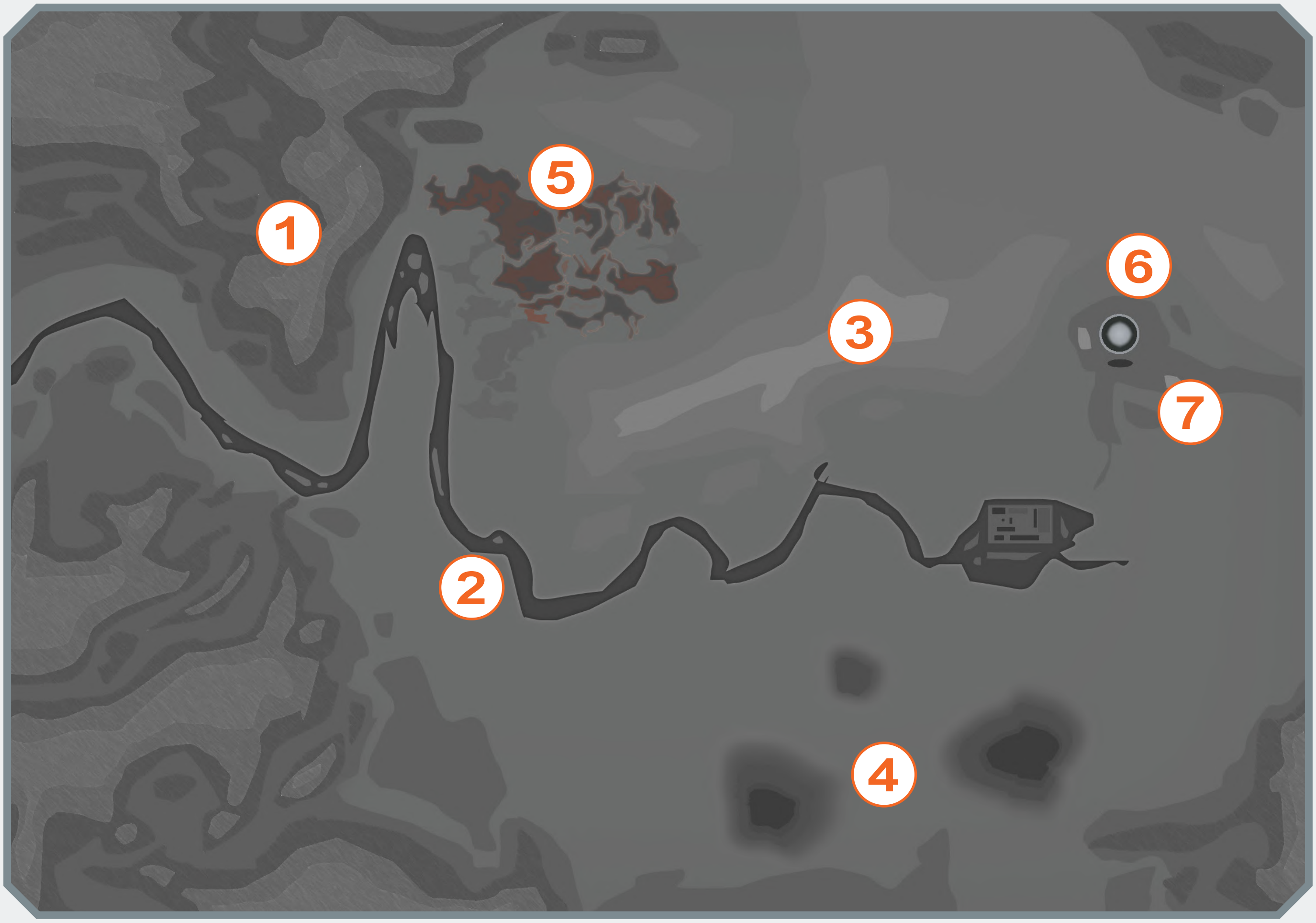
The third outlying installation is the largest and most important. Like the others it is scientific in nature but large enough to run several projects at once. Officially designated the Fuller Experimental Mining Installation, it is more commonly referred to as Hell. Located on the current hot side, Hell has recently passed its ‘midday’ point and will expect sundown in about 50 standard days. It is constructed in a stable area of bedrock and is partially dug into the planetary surface.

Construction of the outlying installations was carried out during the night phase and personnel usually remain there throughout the long local day. Most serve only one local day at an installation, arriving soon after sundown and leaving once conditions cool again after what it known as a hotside rotation. Vehicles visit the installations during the day but must carefully wend their way through ravines and behind ridges to remain out of direct sunlight.

SHELTER CANYON SETTLEMENT (7)

The main installation on Calefaction is known as Shelter Canyon Settlement, or usually just ‘Shelter’. It is presented in detail on page 108.

THE SHELTER CANYON REGION



GOING TO HELL

It is not practicable to fly a ship directly to the Fuller Experimental Mining Installation. Heating and radiation effects will cause serious damage in a short time, possibly leading to a crash from which there can be no rescue. Even if the installation can be reached, the ship is going to have to stand outside in the full glare of Calefaction's star. Any competent spacer will realise this is simply not an option. If the Travellers insist on trying anyway despite the warnings, the Referee should impose the full effects upon their ship without remorse.

However, the Travellers may be able to land at the installation before their vessel succumbs. This would be a rather sad and pointless end for a legendary ship like *Garnette* but the universe does not care about fame or reputation; only energy and forces. Getting from a ship to the installation is likely to be fatal anyway but a kind Referee might rule that there is a modified ATV at the installation – in addition to the one Sorrel is using – and have it come out to pick up the Travellers. This permits them to continue the adventure and eventually get back to Shelter Canyon, albeit without their ship or anything in it. There are perhaps lessons to be learned from such an occurrence.

It would be far more sensible to land at Shelter Canyon and travel overland from there. If the Travellers are overly wary about exposing their ship to the intense heat and radiation of Calfaction's star, they can hitch a ride from Caledonia aboard one of the heavily protected in-system vessels based out of Shelter Canyon. These operate to and from Caledonia only intermittently when there is some need but one should be made available if the Travellers will not use their own ship – or if they do not have one.

APPROACHING CALEFACTION

Whatever ship they are on, the Travellers will need to approach Calefaction. The system's star is gigantic now, swollen and bloated. Its core is inert helium, surrounded by hydrogen fusion which produces small flares and varying – but always intense – radiation. Any inner planets were long ago swallowed up and the expansion process is not yet complete.

Calefaction itself may have once been a gas giant with a solid core. Today it is an irregular lump of relatively dense matter, smaller than Earth but more dense. Surface gravity is a mildly uncomfortable 1.09G. The planet's rotation has been slowed by tidal forces but has not quite stopped, exposing both sides to alternate periods of heat and cold. It is the very epitome of a hostile environment, yet people live and work there.

A dogleg course can be used to keep the planet between their ship and the sun. If the Travellers are aboard someone else's ship they have nothing to do but worry about the astrogator making a mistake. If the Travellers plot their own course, this requires an Astrogation check at a secret difficulty level. The Referee should get the Travellers to make the check and note the result, comparing it to a requirement of Very Difficult (12+) for a perfect course. Every point of negative Effect results in an exposure to direct starlight. No damage is caused immediately and if the ship's pilot can make a Difficult (10+) Pilot check, they can get back to a safe position without over-correcting and becoming exposed again. Each point of negative Effect on Pilot checks corresponds to one round of exposure to direct starlight. See Conditions on Calefaction (page 100) for how this might affect the Travellers' ship.

Eventually, the vessel approaches the dark side of Calefaction. This is a chance for the Referee to establish just how hostile local conditions are and perhaps remind the Travellers about the majesty of the universe. Approaching the installation at Shelter Canyon by flying through the canyon itself requires only a Difficult (10+) Pilot check and takes about four hours at a careful pace. Each point of negative Effect indicates an unscheduled terrain interaction, causing 1D hull damage but otherwise running the canyon is safe enough unless done at speed. Travellers who want to hop over some of the snakier bits can do so but will be in direct starlight for a period. How long this is must be determined by a Pilot check made after the hop is begun. The check is Average (8+), with one round of exposure plus one per point of negative Effect. It is possible to abort a hop and dive back into the canyon after D3 rounds.

HIGH GUARD: MYSTERIES OF THE ANCIENTS

HEAT MANAGEMENT GEL SYSTEM

Advances in materials technology have allowed the creation of substances with incredible heat-storage capabilities. One application of these substances is the so-called ‘chill can’ used to absorb heat emissions from a combat suit, thereby rendering the user’s thermal signature almost zero until the can reaches its capacity. The usual approach is to dispose of the can and attach a new one at this point. A much larger version of the chill can is used by some starships for heat management, and by certain installations as an energy store.

One displacement ton of TL12 Heat Management Gel (HMG) can store 20 points of heat, although a mechanism for transferring the heat into the gel must be in place. At TL14 this increases to 25 points of heat. Once heated, the gel emits heat relatively slowly. This enables it to be used as a power source, providing some means of converting heat to electricity is available. The usual system is a turbine and generator arrangement. This is an unusual setup, rarely used other than on worlds receiving a great deal of stellar heating during their day cycle. More commonly, containers of gel are connected to the cooling system of a starship. They may be ejected from the ship when hot or stored and allowed to cool using the ship's normal heat-management system. This can be a slow process but does keep costs down.

The ejection-capable system has the advantage of being able to immediately dispose of a gel container through a port in the hull and to move another into place. The standard system requires manual disconnection and connection of another canister, which typically takes around 3D minutes for a skilled crew of two or three personnel. 'Full' canisters are generally safe to handle but the gel inside will remain hot for weeks or months unless connected to a cooling system and returned to a normal temperature.

SHORT-DURATION MANOEUVRE DRIVE

The Short-Duration Manoeuvre Drive, or SDM, is an emergency device intended for use aboard lifeboats and evacuation craft. Its output is greater than a standard manoeuvre drive but at the cost of burning out the unit after a short time. An SDM costs 10% of the cost of a standard manoeuvre drive and produces twice the Thrust. However, as soon as it is activated the unit begins to damage itself even if it is not producing Thrust. Every 1D hours the Referee must make a straight 2D check. On 4- the drive breaks down and on a natural 2 it suffers a catastrophic failure which will compromise the vessel. This does 1Dx1D hull damage, which can completely destroy many lifeboats. Armour does not protect against this damage. Each time the check is passed, a cumulative DM-1 is applied to subsequent checks, although it is only on a natural 2 that an explosion occurs. A broken-down drive could in theory be refurbished but this is more a matter of necessity than cost. Refurbishment costs twice as much as simply buying a new unit and fitting it. Manoeuvre drive Power costs are based off delivered Thrust.

HIGHGUARD: INDIVIDUAL SURVIVAL POD

Survival pods are a combination of an acceleration seat and emergency low berth. Each pod has a very basic auto-guidance system which will try to make a 'soft-ish' landing on a planetary surface or to move towards a rescue craft using very basic gas-jet thrusters. Each pod consumes one ton and costs Cr350000. Four pods require 1 Power.

Heat Management Gel Systems

Item	TL	Cost	Tonnage	Notes
Basic Gel Heat Management System	12	MCr2 + MCr0.1 per ton of additional capacity	4	Basic system can connect to 2 tons of gel containers. Any additional capacity must be bought. Gel container tonnage is not included in tonnage for the system.
Ejection-Capable Gel Heat Management System	13	MCr3 + MCr0.2.5 per ton of additional capacity	6	System can connect to 2 tons of gel containers. Any additional capacity must be bought. Gel container tonnage is not included in tonnage for the system.
Standard Heat Management Gel	12	MCr0.05 per ton	1	Capacity 20 heat per ton.
Advanced Heat Management Gel	14	MCr0.1 per ton	1	Capacity 25 heat per ton.

SHELTER CANYON SETTLEMENT

The main settlement on Calefaction is officially known as Shelter Canyon, as is the canyon itself. However, the latter is usually referred to just as 'the Canyon' and the settlement as 'Shelter'. The immediate area of canyon floor around Shelter has been smoothed off with plasma cutters and a more or less flat roadway driven along the canyon floor for a distance of about 200 kilometres. The canyon twists and wends its way to that point, where it enters a natural depression in the Falco Mountains. Natural ramps at various points on the canyon have been smoothed and widened, allowing access to the surface. Travellers aboard a ship running the canyon might spot an ATV labouring up one of these, headed for the cold face.

The settlement lies more or less at the end of the canyon and remains in shade as the planet slowly rotates. Beyond it is a cleared area serving as a landing pad after which the terrain becomes rougher. The canyon splits into several smaller ones, some characterised by landslides and unstable terrain. Scientists from the settlement have set up various instruments and are measuring the stress in the rocks nearby. Their conclusion is that the canyon is slowly widening. One of the smaller crevices will become an extension of the main canyon in time. The settlement is stable enough for now but the long-term prospect is that it will become untenable at some point.

The settlement consists of individual buildings, each on an artificial 'raft' of Loscom. Loscom is a generic term derived from Locally Sourced Construction Material, referring to a process by which local rocks are pulverised and shaped into slabs using plasma-metamorphosis. The process is not dissimilar to the way sedimentary rocks become much harder metamorphic rocks – such as limestone becoming marble – due to the natural heating of a volcanic area. Loscom can be made from almost any rock, although denser and harder raw materials require a smaller volume to produce a Loscom block of any given size.

Loscom is extremely hard and heat-resistant, providing a firm base for the settlement's structures. These are connected by flexible tunnels which run a little above ground level. As a result the base is extremely resistant to the effects of quakes, which are not uncommon. The quakes stem mainly from temperature differentials between the hot and cold sides of Calefaction. Damage is at most minor, as each structure can move around atop its rocky raft and the connecting tunnels have concertina sections which allow them to cope with slight displacement.

The settlement is primarily a scientific outpost, with laboratories mostly associated with planetary sciences. There is also a mineralogy lab dedicated to the mining industry. Other structures are living and recreation spaces and garages for ground vehicles. A set of huge doors in the rock face allow crawlers to enter a curving, rising tunnel bored through the ridge. This exits under a reflective awning on the current hot side, from where surface vehicles begin their hazardous journeys across the surface. Vehicles venturing out onto the hot side use the cover of natural obstructions such as hills and gullies to stay out of direct sunlight. This is only possible for a few hundred kilometres around the poles. Elsewhere the planet is almost entirely unmapped.

ROADWAY AND ATV BAYS (1)

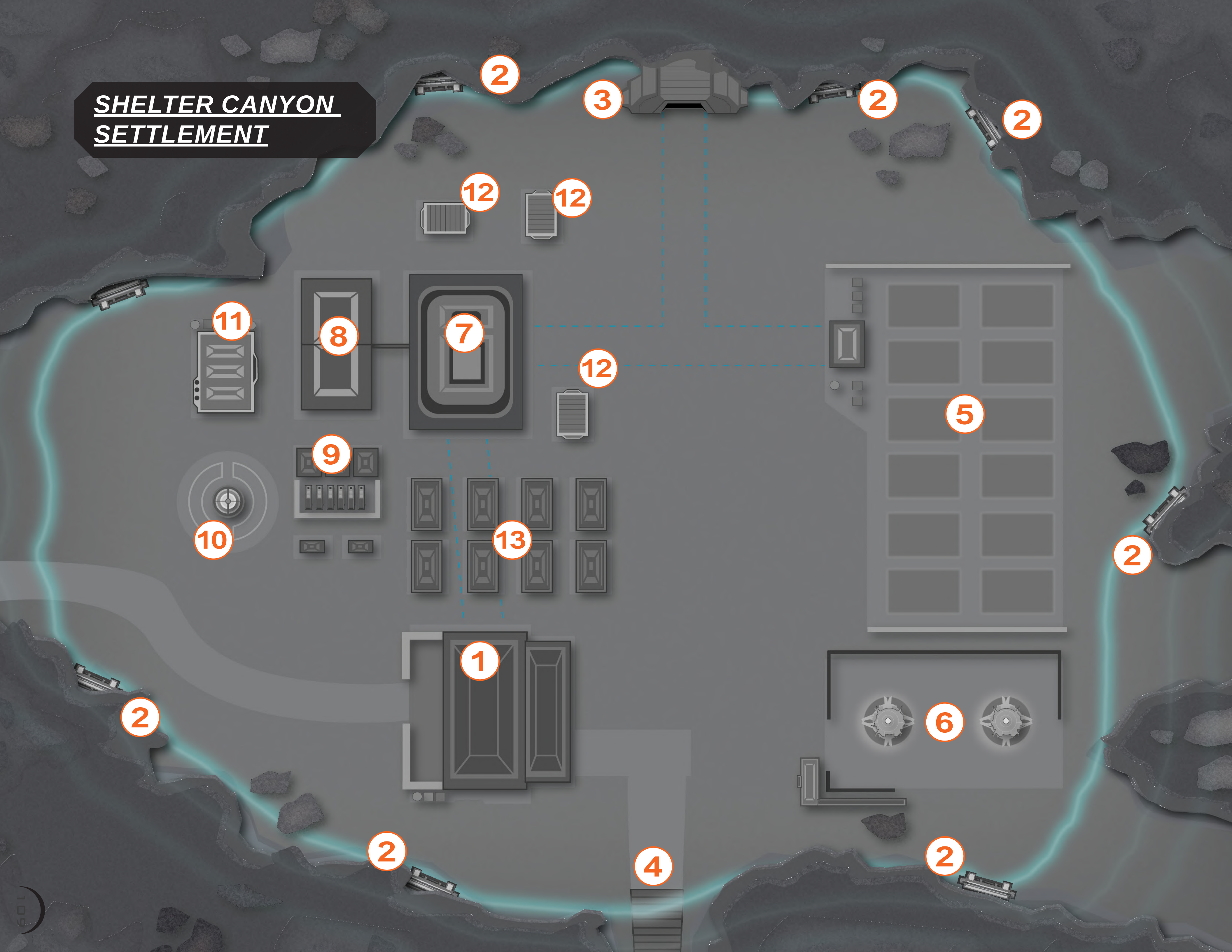
The roadway leading down the canyon is well-travelled by the standards of Calefaction, seeing as many as two or three ATVs per week in a busy period. Those operating on the cold side or in the Falco mountains are mostly modified conventional ATVs, whereas those intended for use on the bright face are custom designs. All have extensive radiation protection and heavily shielded electronic systems.

The roadway terminates in a large ATV bay where vehicles can be de-irradiated using specialised nuclear dampers. Careful inspections are carried out whenever a vehicle arrives and before it leaves again, and maintenance is never postponed. The settlement's safety record is very good as a result. A personnel tunnel gives access to the main administrative building and thence to the rest of the settlement.

DAMPER ARRAYS (2)

The settlement is surrounded by a ring of large devices which resemble fixed-array sensor antennae. These are in fact modified nuclear dampers, focused to point inwards and upwards. This creates a low-radiation zone around the installation within which electronic devices work more or less normally and it is safe to operate outside in a vacc suit. The setup is designed to be multiply redundant, such that the environment will remain workable with a 25% loss in damping output and survivable – with treatment after

SHELTER CANYON SETTLEMENT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an emergency departure – down to 20–30% output. Any drop below 80% capacity would be considered a major emergency, however, with evacuation mandatory at 50% output. At that point, personnel would be receiving harmful doses of radiation and electronic disruption would be a serious problem.

HOTSIDE TUNNEL (3)

Officially named the Aslett Tunnel, a huge set of doors gives access to a second ATV bay, with another set covering a sloping tunnel which finally emerges below the Aslett Ridge. This is currently the bright face of Calefaction. ATVs set up to operate there are stowed in the bay, which has de-irradiation facilities and an access tunnel leading to either the landing area of the main admin building.

COLDSIDE RAMP (4)

Access to the current cold face is by way of a ramp cut into the canyon side, creating in effect a sloping artificial canyon leading to the surface. The ramp curves upward, ensuring there is no straight path for starlight when the ramp is on the bright face.

LANDING AREA (5)

The landing area is composed of Loscom rafts, positioned close together but with some movement possible in a quake. This makes it possible for a klutz pilot to get a landing leg between the rafts – with disastrous consequences – but the landing area overall is sufficiently resilient to survive even a major quake.

EMERGENCY ASCENT VEHICLES (EAV) (6)

The installation has two Emergency Ascent Vehicles; essentially planetary escape pods. These are a custom design intended for use on Calefaction and more resilient than those used in more moderately hostile environments. The EAVs are very simple craft, designed to do nothing more than get personnel away from the planetary surface as fast as possible. They consist of an overpowered drive module and a control area, with four rings of eight personal survival pods in between. These are configured as emergency low berths but can act as normal acceleration couches instead. The whole setup is extremely cramped.

In a dire emergency, an EAV can lift up to 32 personnel plus a pilot off the planet and carry them to a safe distance. It might even be possible to make the crossing to Caledonia, although the units are not designed to land. Instead they eject their survival pods to be either picked up in space or to make a meteoric descent onto a planetary surface. Nobody on Calefaction expects to ever use the EAVs, and survival prospects are slim if they do. It is a measure of how hostile the environment is that anyone would even consider these to be a good option.

Power output is slightly less than sufficient to run the craft at full capacity. However, if used as a lifeboat without anyone entering suspended animation there is plenty of power. Batteries allow the shortfall to be made up for a time and the craft can operate indefinitely with 24 out of the 32 emergency low berths in operation. In the case of Calefaction it is heat capacity which is important. The EAV can absorb 30 points of heat before suffering harm, plus 80 more that can be shunted into heat management gel. Craft on Calefaction are programmed to put the vessel in the shadow of the planet as much as possible but the need to get clear may override this. A pilot can make their own decisions, of course.

MAIN ADMIN BUILDING (7)

The heart of the settlement is the main admin building, which might better be termed a 'main everything building'. It is normally accessed from the main ATV berthing area or the tunnel connecting the landing area and the ATV berthing area. Tunnels meet in a ready chamber with annexes for vacc suits, hostile environment suits and all manner of tools, instruments and general working necessaries. Access to the main level is by way of an elevator shaft.

Travellers who think about these things might wonder at the wisdom of running tunnels through a quake-prone area. The fact is there is no alternative; above-ground movement is potentially even more dangerous. The tunnels are lined with flexible material, with concertina sections and compartmentalising hatches, and are as safe as they can be made. Even so they have to be occasionally repaired. Likewise the lift shaft up into the main admin building is lined with the same material and shows signs of infrequent repairs.

CALEFACTION EAV

TL12		TONS	COST (MCR)
Hull	60 tons, standard	—	3
Armour	Crystaliron, Armour: 8	6	1
M-Drive	Short-Duration Manoeuvre Drive Thrust 8	2.4	0.48
Power Plant	Fusion (TL12), Power 60	4	4
Fuel Tanks	4 weeks of operation	0.4	—
Bridge	Cockpit	1.5	0.01
Computer	Computer/5	—	0.3
Sensors	Basic	—	—
Systems	High Efficiency Batteries (Power 300)	5	1
	Basic Gel Heat Management System	4	2.2
	Standard Heat Management Gel	4	0.2
Software	Library	—	—
	Manoeuvre/0	—	—
Staterooms	Individual Survival Pods x32	32	11.2
Cargo		0.7	—
Total: MCr23.39			

Crew

Pilots

Hull: 24

Running Costs

MAINTENANCE COST

Cr1949/month

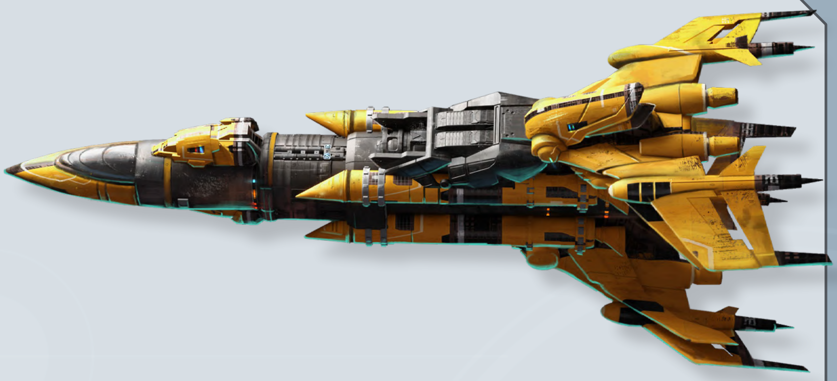
PURCHASE COST

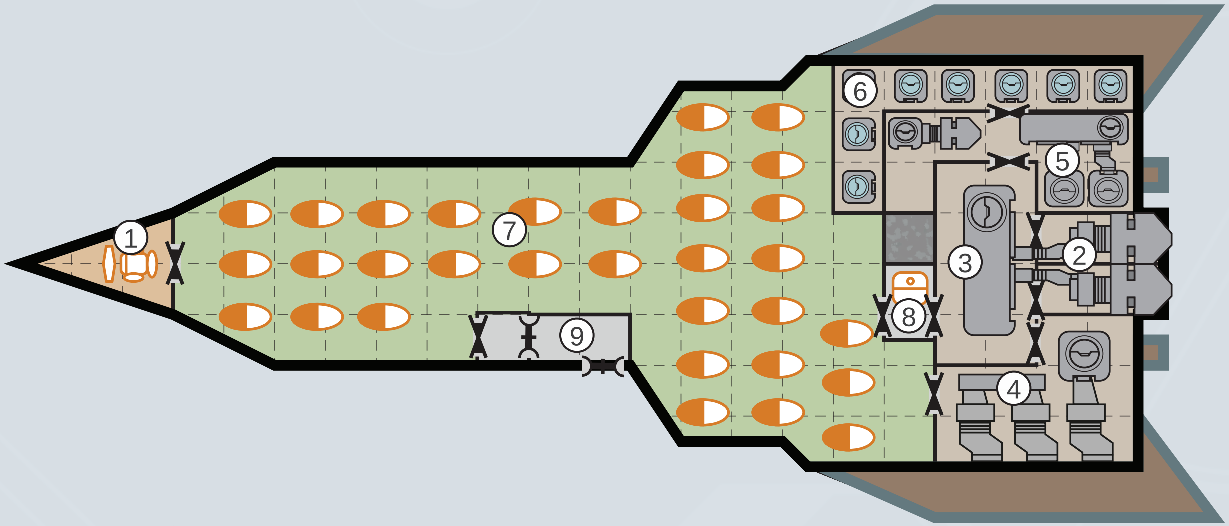
MCr23.39

Power Requirements

Basic Ship Systems	6
Manoeuvre Drive	48
Systems	8

LEGEND
1. Bridge
2. Manoeuvre drive
3. Power plant
4. High efficiency batteries
5. Basic gel heat management system
6. Standard heat management gel
7. Survival pods
8. Cargo
9. Airlock





1 square = 0.5 Ton

Once in the reception of the main building the Travellers can get a flavour of the place. It is built on a tough-and-utilitarian basis, overlaid with the staff's efforts to make the installation a little less soul-destroying to live in. There are works of art – of a sort – on the walls. Mainly these are paintings, framed with metal because nothing prettier is available. The art is mostly in one of two styles, clearly the work of the same individual. Neither is good but again this is what is available. People try to make a life, even in this hell-hole.

The admin building connects to others by above-ground flexible tunnels and has an airlock leading directly outside. It is rarely used except for maintenance and checks on the nuclear dampers surrounding the installation. The admin building contains a few offices, server rooms, a communications suite and a briefing area. The latter is well-used, as a debrief is necessary after every foray outside and the same tired but utterly vital safety briefing is issued before each mission. There will usually be only one or two people in the building at any one time unless a mission is preparing or coming back in.

RECREATION BUILDING (8)

'The Rec' is the social centre of the base. It has a sports hall and gym, a basic holo-theatre and a canteen as well as what passes for a bar. There are usually a couple of people here at any given time, with others drifting in for meals at all hours. The installation has an official 24-hour day but many personnel work as necessary rather than trying to stick to an artificial cycle. Whenever there is a major event the canteen is used as a meeting hall. The rest of the time it sees a steady but low level of activity.

REACTOR CHAMBER AND TANKS (9)

The installation's primary power source is a standard fusion reactor housed in an above-ground structure. Its fuel store is contained in starship-grade tanks immediately adjacent. Each building has a large fuel cell bank to even out demand and provide backup in the event of damage to power trunking. The reactor chamber is routinely locked, with access limited to certain personnel. Most other parts of the installation are unsecured.

COMMS TOWER (10)

The communications tower is much taller than other buildings in the installation. It takes the form of a fine cone with an array of antennae on the top. A turret houses a communications laser which is used to target repeaters on the canyon lip. These are heavily armoured and normally kept closed, popping open for a few moments at regular intervals to receive and retransmit data. The rest of the time the electronic systems within are protected from radiation and heat.

MAIN LABORATORY (11)

The main laboratory contains facilities for planetary sciences and mining-related experiments as well as heavy rock crushing equipment. The laboratory is always in use, although rarely are there more than three or four people present. Most of the heavy work is done by robots.

ADDITIONAL LABS (12)

Three smaller laboratories are located outside the admin building. They can be configured to whatever special project is currently in progress, though one of the labs is permanently assigned to monitoring local radiation and seismic conditions and reporting on the status of the nuclear damper fields.

DWELLINGS (13)

Eight near-identical dwelling complexes house the installation's staff. Each has seven starship-type cabins plus a small living area and kitchenette. Conditions are cramped but Calefaction is a place to work, not a vacation site.

TAKING SHELTER

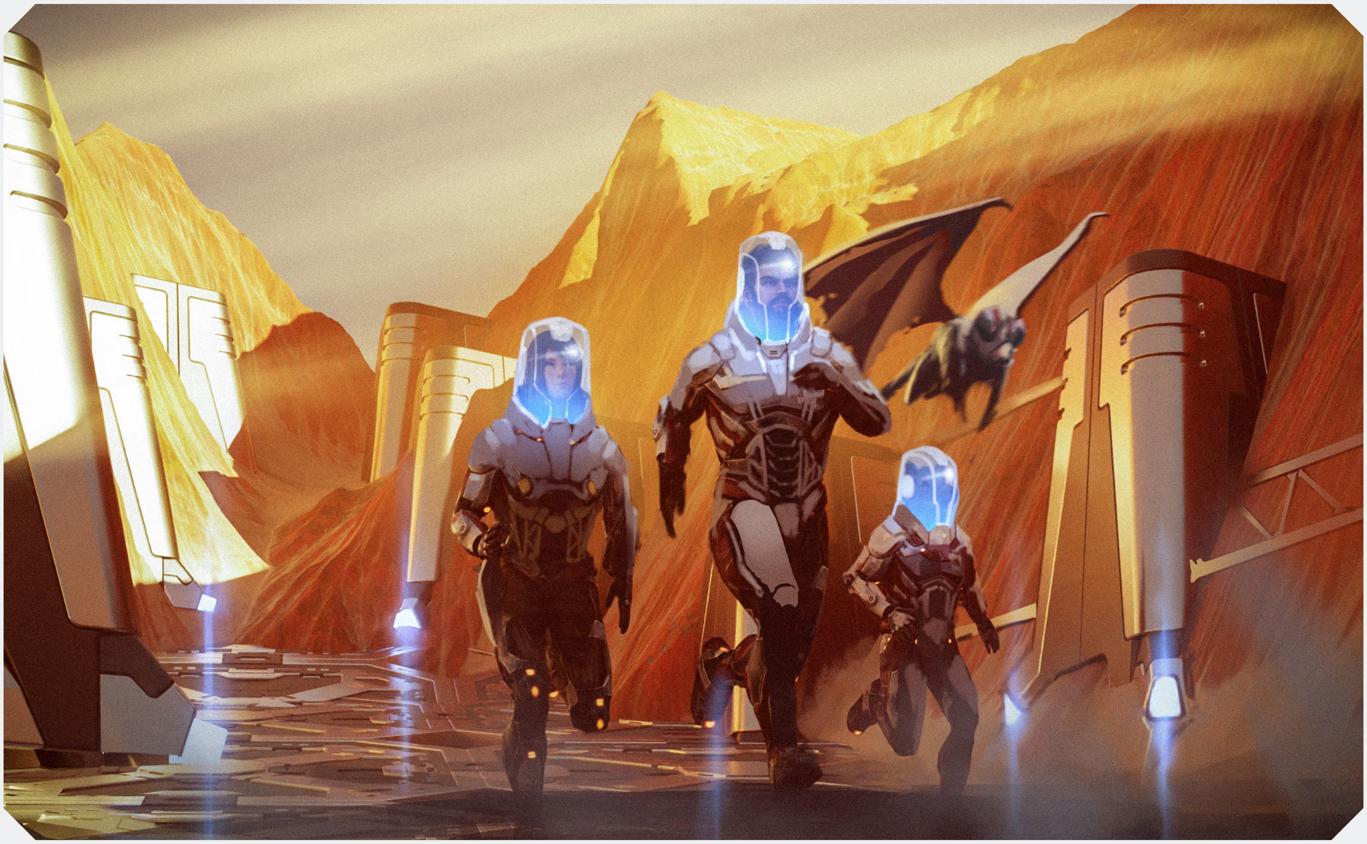
Whether the Travellers arrive in their own ship or come in on a shuttle from Caledonia, arriving at Shelter Canyon settlement might be a bit underwhelming. The Travellers might see a couple of standard ATVs moving along the canyon floor from the dark side of the planet and up ahead the small settlement. They will note its unusual construction and might realise this is a form of earthquake-proofing. The facilities for handling spacecraft are rather basic, although the pads are big enough to hold several vessels at once. It is necessary to disembark in vacc suits and handle tasks such as refuelling manually using long hoses from the storage tanks. These are above-ground, mounted on Loscom rafts to protect against quakes and have reflective coatings as well as multiple spaced outer sheaths.

The settlement is in constant semi-darkness, protected by the canyon's high walls from the star's rays throughout an entire rotation. The 'cold side' canyon wall is brightly lit, creating a contrast that makes the shaded area seem even darker. In all, the settlement is a strange environment which does not permit visitors to forget how dangerous the planet is. Astute Travellers might note that the settlement is ringed by nuclear dampers.

Entering the settlement is by way of the main admin/offworld affairs building. It is possible to walk to it across the surface in safety most of the time but the majority of personnel prefer to use the tunnel. Indeed, since vacc suit stowage is at the tunnel end those who use the above-ground airlock must make the 'walk of noob' through the building to stow their kit. This will elicit knowing smiles from those familiar with how the installation operates. If the Travellers do come in this way, they may be surprised that everyone is more concerned with telling them to get their kit checked and stowed – and in some cases offering to help – than with asking why they are on Calefaction or conducting any sort of security checks.

Once they have stowed their gear the Travellers can start talking to people. It is immediately obvious there is little sense of curiosity about the Travellers and they may be able to figure out why. Everyone who comes to Calefaction is somehow connected to the mining industry or the scientific research going on there. Personnel at the settlement tend to assume visitors have legitimate business and are someone else's problem. If they ask enough dumb questions or stand out in some way, eventually someone will get around to asking what they want. Otherwise the Travellers will be accepted almost immediately – walk of noob or no.

Soon after their arrival the Travellers will find or be found by Caroline Lidu, the installation operations manager. She is a career mining engineer turned administrator, who has relatively little to do in that capacity. Despite the dangerous location there is not all that much admin. So long as the technical people do their jobs Caroline has little to do other than file routine reports and log new arrivals into the system. If they did not do their jobs Caroline would have only one task to perform – giving the evacuation order. She is not relaxed as such, and certainly not complacent, but spends more of her time troubleshooting practical problems for less experienced crewmembers than administering the base. Today is an exception; she has some new guys to log in.



Caroline invites the Travellers to her office and sets them up on the system personally. This is simply a matter of logging their arrival and designation. Almost any explanation for the Travellers' presence will suffice providing it makes sense. Nobody comes to Calefaction unless they have to, so a vague statement about assisting with research or picking up an infodump will suffice. Nobody will even ask who from or where; this is simply not a place that has security concerns. If the Travellers seem like they are associated with or on contract to a science or experimental mining project, that will do. They will attract more interest by saying they are visiting a friend or some such, as this is pretty unusual.

Mentioning Sorrel's name will not mean anything to most of the people at the settlement. Those who work in the outlying installations tend to pass briefly through Shelter Canyon on their way in and out, rarely interacting much with anyone. However, the fact that the Travellers can name someone will reassure anyone they interact with that they are on-planet for a legitimate reason. A quick search of the personnel database indicates Sorrel is a staff member at Fuller Experimental Mining Installation. Little more information is available at the general-access level and even those with full access can see only a very basic personnel file. This indicates Sorrel was hired as a general research assistant through a third-party recruiter at Egypt starport. There is nothing out of the ordinary about this.

ACTIVITIES

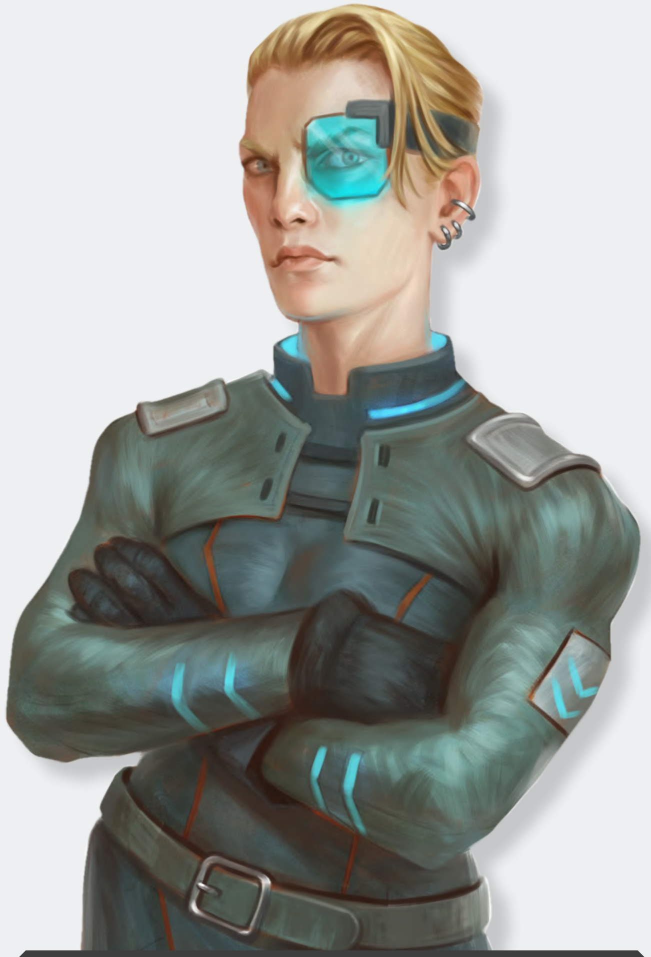
Shelter Canyon Settlement has living quarters for 56 people, although its usual staffing level is about half that, with a few additional 'temporaries' staying over for a day or two whilst delivering or picking up data, consulting with the scientists or conducting whatever business absolutely requires their presence. Nobody stays longer than they have to and those that work here are fully aware of why. They are very highly paid and expecting to benefit from their time here by achieving faster promotion or better contracts. In short, Calefaction is a means to an end for these people. They feel a bond due to shared danger and mutual respect but there are few who do not look forward to leaving. New arrivals are assumed to be of a similar mindset and will be quickly accepted so long as they do not reek of incompetence.

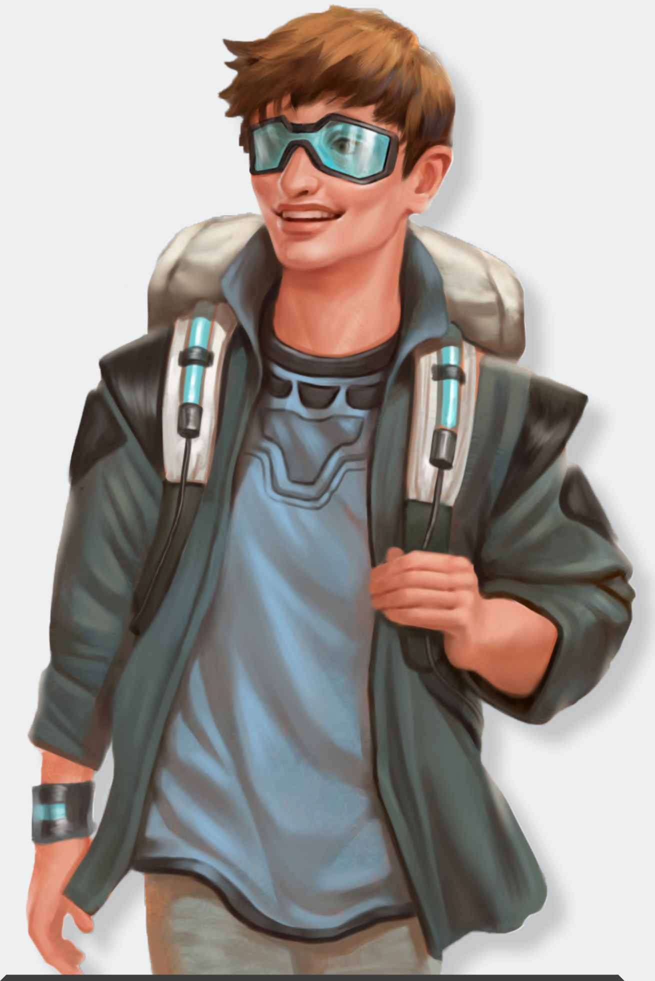
If the Travellers want or need to stay over at the settlement they can rent a room and get unlimited access to the limited delights of the canteen for Cr25 per day. There is what passes for a bar and some very basic entertainment facilities at the settlement, which tend to be in use around the clock – although by at most a handful of people. Workers are generally glad to have someone new to talk to, and at least some are keen to hear what is happening elsewhere in Charted Space. Nothing much happens on Calefaction except solar flares, mining accidents and minor emergencies, so anyone with new jokes or an interesting story can make friends easily.

There is a general assumption that anyone on Calefaction knows about the planet and its dangers but if the Travellers need it there are plenty of people who can point out the basics. Direct stellar rays will kill you and cremate your body for free. Radiation will mess up your electronics and kill you. Moving along a canyon or behind shelter is the only way to survive, although some of the specialist ATVs are designed to make short transits across the bright face. Going outside a radiation-damped vehicle or zone will result in a quick or slow death but again the specialist ATVs are designed to handle this environment.

If the Travellers say they are going to the Fuller Experimental Mining Installation they will encounter responses like 'well, sorry to hear that' and 'better you than me', but obtaining transport to get there is laughably easy. Every few days an ATV is sent with supplies and to bring data back. Since long-range comms are impossible this is the only way to know the installation is not in distress, so a regular visit is required. If the Travellers want to volunteer the base staff are only too glad to let someone else make the trip. Alternatively, they can travel as passengers.

The Travellers may be suspicious about how easy all this is but they have entered a very different world to the one they are used to. Everyone is concerned about solar flares and what they call 'sunstrikes'. The idea that someone would come here to commit crimes or generally do bad things will not occur to them. In short, so long as the Travellers act like they know what they are doing and have a valid reason for doing it, nobody will suspect they are anything other than yet more temporary workers lured in by the gigantic salaries on offer.





CAROLINE LIDU

SPECIES	GENDER	AGE
Human	Female	38

TRAITS			—	SKILLS
STR	8	INT	10	Admin 2, Electronics (remote ops) 3, Leadership 2, Mechanic 1, Profession (mining engineer) 3, Vacc Suit 3
DEX	8	EDU	9	
END	7	SOC	7	

DAN KEPAKU

SPECIES	GENDER	AGE
—	Male	21

TRAITS			—	SKILLS
STR	8	INT	10	Admin 2, Electronics (remote ops) 3, Leadership 2, Mechanic 1, Profession (mining engineer) 3, Vacc Suit 3
DEX	8	EDU	9	
END	7	SOC	7	

CAROLINE LIDU, SHELTER CANYON ADMINISTRATOR

Caroline Lidu started out as an asteroid miner. Not a Belter in the social sense but working in the same environment. She cut her teeth dragging heavy metals and radioactives out of deep space rocks, gradually moving from engineering to administration. She has no tolerance for stupidity or recklessness but is well aware that people in her line of work tend to develop… foibles. Caroline is willing to let competent people get on with it and does not judge those smart enough to ask for advice.

DAN KEPAKU, ATV CREWMEMBER

The Travellers will become aware of Dan if they spend any time at the settlement. He is an earnest young man not long out of college. He took a job at Shelter Canyon as an ATV operator and general technician, hoping to save enough cash and gain experience to pursue a doctorate in planetology. If the Travellers want advice on making the run to Fuller, or if they want someone to drive them, Dan will be assigned. He is not the usual roughneck mining engineer; he is a scientist-in-the-making. His habit of pointing out features and explaining them might be useful or annoying to the Travellers, depending on their attitude.

TRANSITING THE BRIGHT FACE

If the Travellers want, they can hitch a ride aboard the regular supply ATV to Fuller. Dan will drive it, with the Travellers filling in crew positions if they can. It is actually preferable to the local personnel that the Travellers just take the ATV themselves – it is not like there is anywhere they could go if the Travellers decided to steal the vehicle. Either way they will have to endure the standard safety briefing before they go. Although everyone is weary of it, following the correct procedure is the key to staying alive on Calefaction. There are checklists to follow, inspections to make before boarding and the oft-repeated stern warnings to take no chances.

The transit is by way of a series of ridges and depressions which provide cover from direct stellar heating. This system of cover is well mapped, but most of what lies beyond it is unknown. Only at the poles is starlight sufficiently oblique that cover is available, and even then not constantly. Thus whilst the Travellers could wander around and see the sights – such as they are – there is nowhere to go except Fuller or back to Shelter Canyon.

The Travellers will be able to familiarise themselves with the vehicle before setting off. It is a custom design using a clever multiple-track assembly. Rather than a single track on each side the vehicle has four six track pods which enable it to climb over obstacles without tilting the ATV much and to keep going even if some are lost. On each pod there are four narrow tracks rather than a single broad one. This creates redundancy in case a track is thrown. The vehicle's cooling system, which includes specialist track-cooling units, can only be described as epic.

The Travellers will find that the ATV is easy to operate for such a large piece of machinery, with extensive driver-assist systems but a degree of skill is required to avoid hazards or pick the best path through surface clutter. Driving is more about selecting where the vehicle will go than directly causing it to turn or accelerate – even the most 'manual' driving mode requires extensive computer assistance.

Assuming the Travellers take the indicated route programmed into their navigation system the drive to Fuller will take only a few hours. Those may be stressful hours but most of the journey is simply a careful, steady slog over more or less flat bedrock, interspersed with the occasional dash between areas of shelter. This is best undertaken at a higher speed. The route is rather general, with waypoints indicated and suggestions for the best routes between them. There is usually a choice, with ATV operators able to choose between the fastest and most direct route or longer paths that have better shelter.

The navigation system contains information on the terrain between Shelter and Fuller, with side notes and entries about points of interest along the main route. In general the drive is a matter of trundling along in the shadows, interspersed with accelerated dashes from one set of shadows to the next. The Travellers might perhaps marvel at the spike in temperature as they emerge into sunlight but unless they stop the vehicle they will be safe enough.

EXTREME ENVIRONMENT EQUIPMENT

EXTREME ENVIRONMENT CUSTOMISATION

An extreme environment package can only be applied to a new-build vehicle. It includes all the equipment found in the vacuum, hostile, corrosive and insidious environment packages, with additional protection. The vehicle's heat management system is greatly enhanced, as is radiation protection, and the hull is shielded against electromagnetic interference. The main entry to the vehicle is fitted with a full decontamination-capable airlock, with smaller entries either airlocked or at least fitted with 'occasional use' flexible tent-type airlocks. A long-duration life support system is fitted.

The overall effect is to provide 1,200 rads per hour protection from radiation and full defence against corrosive and insidious atmospheres. Irradiated panels can be removed and either replaced or de-irradiated using a complex high-technology system based upon the nuclear dampers used aboard starships. Extreme environment customisation requires 15% of a vehicle's Spaces, with a minimum of 10 Spaces. Cost is based on the total number of Spaces of the vehicle.

Item	TL	Spaces	Cost per Space
Extreme Environment Customisation	12	15%	Cr100000

ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION REFUGE

Almost any vehicle can be fitted with an environmental protection refuge. This is an armoured box with an airlocked entry and its own dedicated life support system. It provides basic sanitary and rest facilities, a stockpile of food and water, and hardwired links to the vehicle's sensor and communications systems. A refuge can be used aboard a vehicle not otherwise capable of life support, enabling crewmembers to operate the vehicle wearing vacc suits and retreat into the refuge to rest. This is not recommended as it is very tiring and can be hazardous but as an emergency or cost-cutting measure it is sometimes attractive.

More commonly, the refuge is used as a survival shelter inside a hazardous-environment vehicle. In this way, it may permit survival until rescue comes, or allow a crew to recuperate whilst they deal with a long-term problem. Some users keep their vacc suits and survival equipment inside the refuge, working on the principle that if the vehicle is suddenly holed they will have a place to shelter whilst they don their suits. A vehicle can have more than one refuge, of the same or differing sizes.

The EPR provides 400 rads per hour protection from radiation and is sealed against a corrosive atmosphere. It will resist an insidious atmosphere for 1D hours. The cost of a refuge is based on its total number of Spaces.

A spacecraft version is also available, consuming two tons plus one ton per person capacity, or a refuge could be built into a structure if such a survival shelter is deemed necessary.

Item	TL	Spaces	Cost per Space
Environmental Protection Refuge	12	4+2 per person	Cr75000

REIPLAU ALL-TERRAIN VEHICLE

The Reiplau ATV is only viable for extreme environments where lesser vehicles would quickly fail. Built at TL12, it is a crawler-type vehicle with multiple independently steered track systems. It is heavily protected against radiation, extremes of temperature and atmospheric effects, with a nuclear damper system to create a reduced-radiation area around the vehicle.

Crew is nominally eight personnel, although simply driving the vehicle can be accomplished by a single individual. A wide array of tools and instruments are carried, with a small multipurpose laboratory/workspace. In addition to the vehicle's own protection, the crew have access to an emergency shelter in the event of a large solar flare or similar major hazard. Many crews use it as a supplementary living area on long trips, although this is frowned upon by some operators as it can reduce capabilities in a real emergency.

TL	12
Skill	Drive (tracked)
Agility	+1
Speed (cruise)	Medium (Slow)
Range (cruise)	600 (900)
Crew	8
Passengers	0
Cargo	—
Hull	660
Shipping	100 tons
Cost	MCr32.25

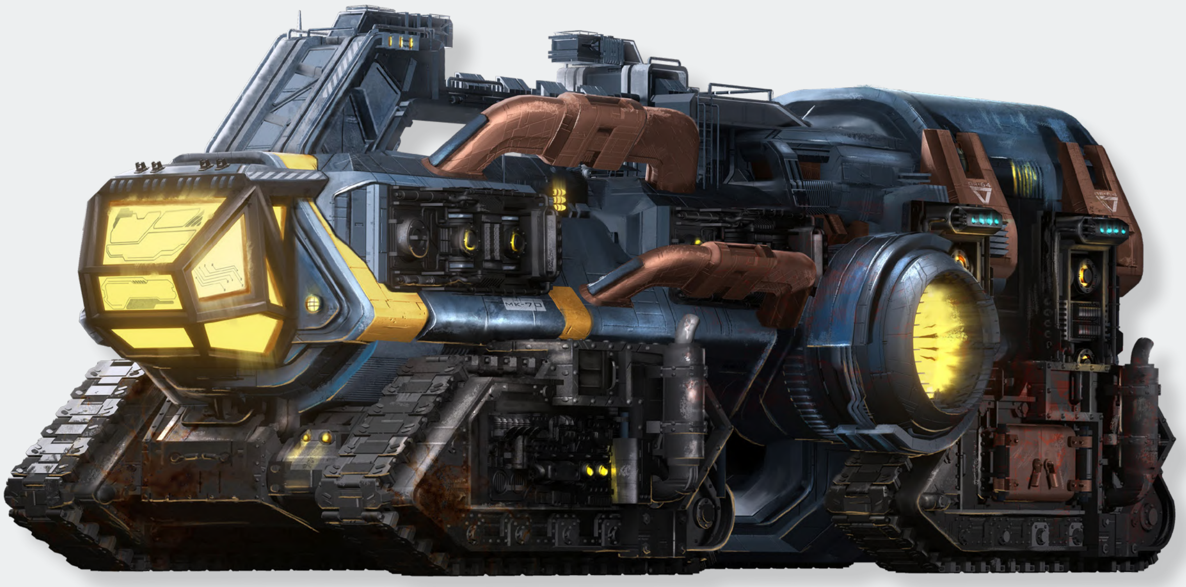
EQUIPMENT

Atmospheric Sampler, Autopilot (advanced), Bunks x4, Communications System (advanced, increased range x2, meson communicator, satellite uplink, tightbeam), Computer/3, Control Systems (advanced), Cranes (medium) x2, Cryoberths x4, Cutting Tool, Digger Blade, Extreme Environment Customisation, Environmental Protection Refuge (8 person), Fire Extinguishers, Freshers x2, Fusion Plant (advanced), Galley (full), Geological Sampler, Laboratory (general-purpose, 4 person), Manipulator Arms (advanced) x2, Navigation System (improved), Nuclear Damper, Sensors (improved, hardened, increased fidelity, increased range x3)

ARMOUR

FRONT	4	REAR	4	SIDES	4

EQUIPMENT	
Autopilot (skill level)	3
Communications (range)	100,000km
Navigation (Navigation DM)	+2
Sensors (Electronics (sensors) DM)	+3
Camouflage (Recon DM)	—
Stealth (Electronics (sensors) DM)	—



REFEREEING THE TRANSIT

For most of the transit the Travellers are simply driving along. Conditions are certainly unusual and dangerous but unless they are reckless or stupid the Travellers will not have to make checks. There will be three significant points of interest along the way. Two of these are serious hazards, highlighted so the Travellers will know what to expect if they are smart enough to plan ahead. Each situation requires decision-making and should be resolved in six-minute periods equivalent to a starship combat round.

The primary threat is overheating and the amount of heat absorbed depends on level and length of exposure to the star's direct emissions. There is also a possibility of damaging the ATV by crashing into something or trying to cross ground that is too uneven for its tracks. Therefore any transit in the open is a trade-off between speed and caution.

Each obstacle the Travellers encounter has a base time to transit, given in minutes, and a Drive check difficulty level. This assumes a cautious and professional approach to driving the ATV. For every difficulty level easier the Traveller wants to check to be – representing greater caution – the transit time is increased by +2 minutes per dice. Existing modifiers are not affected.

For example, if a Traveller does not like the look of a Difficult (10+) transit taking 3D+8 minutes, they could drop the difficulty by two levels to Routine (6+) but this increases the time by +4 per dice. The transit will be safer in terms of avoiding obstacles but it will take 3D+20 minutes during which the ATV may start to overheat.

If the Travellers want to transit faster they can increase the Drive check difficulty by as many levels as they like, up to Formidable (14+). Each level reduces the time taken for the transit by one dice.

For example, an Average (8+) transit taking 4D+6 minutes can be reduced to 3D+6 minutes by increasing the difficulty level by one to Difficult (10+). No transit can be reduced below its '+X' time, so no matter how hard the Travellers try; this transit cannot be done in less than six minutes.

The ATV's extreme environment modifications enable it to withstand high temperatures for vastly longer than a standard vehicle but there are limits. Calefaction has no atmosphere, so heating comes only from direct sunlight and contact with hot rocks beneath the tracks. Areas of rock that are in shade are heated by conduction but to a far lesser degree than those baking under direct light. The vehicle's cooling system takes heat away from contact points – the tracks – and prevents them from melting but it has to go somewhere and there is only so much capacity. The solution to this is twofold: prevent heating as much as possible by remaining in the shade, and halting or moving slowly through cooler areas to allow heat to be shunted back to the tracks and thus into the bedrock. Large radiator panels automatically unfold whenever the vehicle is in a position to get rid of heat.

The ATV has a heating threshold much like a starship. So long as its accumulated heat remains below this threshold the vehicle will take no damage. The threshold for a normal vehicle is 1% of its Hull value. For vehicles like ATVs this is 3%, increased to 5% by the extreme environment modifications. Thus the Travellers' vehicle will only suffer damage once it has exceeded 33 points of heat. At this point, the vehicle is in severe danger. It will suffer Hull damage equal to its total heat every 1D minutes until it drops below 33. In addition, the internal cooling system will be incapable of coping and crew-area temperature will rise rapidly. Each 10 full points of Hull damage inflicts one point of damage on each Traveller inside the vehicle. This is halved if they have personal environmental protection such as a vacc suit.

The Heating and Cooling table indicates how much heat the vehicle can shed in shade and how much it is heated in sunlight. This is applied every six minutes. If the vehicle moves between areas of light and shade within a six-minute period, the Referee should base effects on where the vehicle was at the mid-point of that period.

Dissipation levels assume radiators are extended when in shade. Dissipation is halved if radiators are not used. Heat absorbed is tripled if radiators are extended when in direct sunlight.

Heating and Cooling Conditions

Condition	Heat Received/Dissipated	Notes
Deep Shade	-1D	The deepest and largest shadows, well away from the edges.
Light Shade	-D3	Typical shaded areas or the outer edge of large shaded areas.
Partial Shade	1D	Less than 25% of the ATV is exposed to direct starlight.
Fully Exposed	3D	Most or all of the vehicle is exposed to direct starlight.

For example, the ATV must make a transit in direct starlight. The Travellers think this will take about 10 minutes but they encounter difficult conditions which doubles this time. During the first three six-minute periods the ATV suffers 3D points of heating, for 9,10 and 12 points of heat. This totals 31, barely within the ATV's tolerance. The vehicle is fully exposed for about two minutes of the next period but reaches an area of shadows. At the midpoint of the six-minute period the ATV is considered to be at the outer edge of the shadows, dissipating D3 (in this case the Travellers get a 3) points of heat. With their heat total at 28 the Travellers drive into the deepest shadows and wait for the ATV to dissipate its heat. At the rate of 1D heat per six-minute period this is likely to take about 24 minutes. They could instead press on in the shadowed area, accepting lower heat dissipation rather than waiting in the deepest shadows.

If the Drive check is failed on any given transit, various effects may occur. The Travellers might get lucky and suffer no real problems but misfortune is far more likely in a place like Calefaction. If a problem occurs, the ATV driver has already tried and failed to avert the incident but one of the other Travellers may try. Only one attempt may be made per incident and the Travellers must present some sort of plan which cannot involve just driving the ATV better. Viable options include using Leadership to issue a well-timed command which prevents the driver doing something stupid, or using Mechanic to make a snap decision about what part of the ATV will be least damaged by a collision and implementing a last-second mitigation effort. The Traveller's skill level may be used as a positive DM on the ATV Mishaps table if the Referee thinks the idea is plausible.

To determine the nature of a mishap, roll 2D on the ATV Mishaps table, with a DM equal to the driver's negative Effect and a positive one for any mitigation effort in place.

ATV Mishaps

2D+DMs	Result
0–	The ATV has become stuck on an obstruction. It will remain stuck until the driver succeeds in a Difficult (10+) Drive check. One attempt can be made every 1D minutes. Other Travellers may assist with the check if they can use a relevant skill to help free the ATV. This might be practical, such as moving weight around, or theoretical such as timing a burst of throttle to coincide with a shift in weight.
1–2	A serious mishap has occurred. Consult the Serious Mishaps table.
3–5	Track damage reduces the ATV's speed and handling. DM-1 applies to all Drive checks until repaired and all transit times are increased by +1 minute per dice.
6–8	A significant collision with something causes 4D damage to the ATV and inflicts 2D damage on everyone inside, reduced to 1D if they are strapped into a seat or manage to cling to a support. An Average (8+) STR or DEX check is required for the latter.
9–11	A minor collision with something throws everyone around. Any Traveller not strapped into a seat suffers 1D damage. This is reduced by 1 for every point of Effect on an Average (8+) STR or DEX check.
12+	No-no-no-no-yes! The situation was somehow salvaged, possibly with an epic moment of brilliance or more likely mortal terror. No ill effects befall the Travellers or the ATV.

Serious Mishaps

1D	Result
1	The ATV's radiator panels have become jammed due to damage. This will halve heat dissipation in shadow if it happens when they are furled and increase heat absorption if they are jammed in the deployed position.
2	A serious collision causes damage equal to 2Dx5% of the ATV's remaining Hull.
3	As 2 but in addition the ATV is stuck as per 0- on the ATV Mishaps table.
4	Serious track damage imposes DM-2 on all Drive checks and increases transit times by +2 per dice.
5	The way ahead is impassable. It will take 3D minutes to find a way around in addition to the remaining transit time.
6	False Alarm! Or maybe an incredible piece of driving. Either way, the Travellers got lucky this time.

SERIOUS MISHAPS

In the event a serious mishap occurs, roll 1D on the Serious Mishaps table. No DMs apply. The same disaster can occur more than once.

REPAIRS

The Travellers may have the impression that going outside is a death sentence but if they were paying attention they will realise this is not the case. The ATV's nuclear dampers will protect anyone working outside providing they remain close to the vehicle and working in the shadows will permit their suits to cope with the extreme conditions. A significant repair task such as removing one point of DM caused by track damage, fixing the radiator panels or reducing transit time penalties by one point per dice takes 4D skill-point-hours of work. That is to say, if the job is 14 skill-point-hours long someone with Mechanic 1 will take 14 hours but three Travellers with four points of Mechanic between them can do it in 3.5 hours. Hull damage cannot be repaired in the field, although a specific area could be patched up to prevent failure of critical systems.

LAVA FALLS

Early in the journey the Travellers will witness Calefaction's equivalent of a waterfall as they proceed in the shadow of a tall escarpment. Crust stresses have permitted magma to get close to the surface within the escarpment, with some of it escaping through faults in the rock to create a waterfall-like effect. Molten rock has formed pools at the base of the escarpment, requiring a detour into direct sunlight. The Travellers have a choice between cutting close to where molten lava is splashing in the pool or swinging wide around an area of impassable terrain.

Going straight past the lava flow exposes the ATV to some direct starlight, counting as partial shade. This is a transit of 2D+6 minutes, with the possibility of being splashed with molten rock. Every 1D minutes, roll a straight 2D check. On 9+ a gobbet of lava spats on the side of the ATV. This causes 1Dx1D damage and is distinctly alarming. There is no significant heating effect.

Going around will take a lot longer; 5D+12 minutes in all. Unless the Travellers push hard and try to go fast, the ATV is likely to take damage during this transit. This is within tolerable limits unless something goes wrong; most of the hull damage caused by heating is easily fixed at the end of a journey and doing so is entirely routine. The Travellers would not attract censure for this as minor repairs are necessary after almost every trip.

THE NGO STRAIT

The No-Good-Option (NGO) Strait is the one part of the route where it is necessary to make a run in full sunlight for more than a few seconds. Different crews have varying opinions about what the best route might be. Some will crash straight across the open area and accept that it will be necessary to tackle some highly uneven terrain. Others will thread their way through with what they think is the best path at the highest speed possible.

The brute force option is a straight dash nominally taking 4D+10 minutes in direct sunlight. However, there is a very rough area to negotiate with a possibility of getting completely stuck. If that happens the driver must free the vehicle before it is destroyed; there will be no rescue. Dashing to the rough area takes a nominal 2D+4 minutes and requires an Average (8+)

Drive check. The rough area takes 1D+4 minutes to cross and requires a Difficult (10+) Drive check. If this one is failed the Travellers receive DM-4 on the ATV Mishap table. Finally another fast run on flat ground is required, taking 1D+2 minutes.

If the Travellers prefer to pick a path through the rough areas, seeking to create the fastest run, maps are available. The Travellers must make a Difficult (10+) Navigation check. The route they come up with is a nominal 6D+12 minutes, minus three minutes for every point of Effect. Failure does not increase the transit time. Once the route is planned the Travellers can choose how fast to make the run as usual. If no planning is done and the Travellers just try to charge through by the seat of their collective pants the run consists of three sections, each of 2D+6 minutes. A Drive check is necessary for each, with the usual chances of a mishap.

COMMS RIDGE

Comms ridge is not an obstacle as such. The Travellers can transit in the shadow of a small canyon and will spot a small tower atop one wall. They may be alarmed to see a turret pop up as they approach within 500 metres, at which point their vehicle is hit by a comms laser. It makes a quick data dump and retracts. Much of the data seems to be telemetry on various vehicles or robots as well as data on the status of comms towers like this one and the base itself. It would take some time to figure out what it all means but one piece of data is very clear. It is a distress call from a stranded ATV. There is no personal message, just a beacon, but the signal states: 'ATV/Fuller Installation/Sorrel Tergaii'. There is no indication of who else might be aboard but Sorrell is in command of the vehicle and she needs help. The ATV is more or less on the approach route to Fuller.

RESCUING SORREL

Radio communications are often limited to a few tens of metres on Calefaction and never more than a couple of kilometres. Sensors based on the same emissions, such as radar, are equally useless most of the time. Optical devices such as lasers are unaffected, which is why the Travellers were able to receive the retransmitted distress call once they neared the comms tower. Once the Travellers get within about 100 metres of Sorrel's vehicle they will be able to use radio and radar to get more information.

Sorrel's vehicle is only a few kilometres from the Fuller installation. As the Travellers approach they can see it is in desperate trouble. It appears to have shed a whole track group whilst out in the open. Presumably Sorrel realised she had no chance of returning to the installation so sacrificed what was left of the vehicle's mobility to drag it into the shade of a nearby outcrop. Debris from the track system is scattered along the vehicle's path.

Once the Travellers have direct line of sight they can point a communications laser at the other ATV and within a few hundred metres they can use radio-frequency comms. These are still patchy and difficult to make out until the Travellers are very close. Using the emergency interrogative function, the Travellers can get an update on the vehicle's condition. It reports that there are two people aboard, out of an initial crew of two, and that both are alive. They are named as Sorrel Tergaii and Kaigh Husak, both humans and both members of the Fuller staff. The vehicle has power but reports it is immobile and has suffered serious damage. Its cooling system is beginning to fail and there is initially no response to attempts to contact Sorrel.

It would be possible to get close alongside, although a bit tricky. Achieving full deep shade coverage with the other ATV in the way requires a Difficult (10+) Drive check. Failure means the vehicle is only in light shade, although this might be enough as radiation levels are not too bad due to the dampers aboard both vehicles. As the Travellers approach they will notice that a couple of robots have been deployed in a vain attempt to make repairs. All they have achieved is to collect bits of the tracks and make an untidy pile. It is clear that this ATV cannot be made mobile without getting it to a proper facility and there is no way to do that. Towing will require dragging the vehicle, slowing both to the point where overheating is certain during bright transits.

It may, however, be possible to save the crew. As the Travellers approach, the other ATV's comms laser deploys and the Travellers' screens light up with a scene from inside the vehicle. Sorrel and Kaigh appear to be alive and uninjured. They are in a cramped space, suited up but with helmets off. Their relief and delight at seeing absolutely anybody is obvious but when Sorrel realises who the rescuers are her astonishment is obvious. In case the Travellers cannot figure out what happened, Sorrel provides a quick sitrep.

She and Kaigh took the ATV out on a sample-collecting and instrument maintenance trip. It was supposed to be a few hours, with visits to a couple of natural sites and an instrument cluster followed by another attempt to get samples from what Sorrel refers to as 'one of the big ones'. They deployed the robots as usual to grab rock and mineral-deposit samples, which went fine, but they did not reach the instrument cluster. The ATV suffered a catastrophic track malfunction, somehow shredding the whole group instead of a single line. The tracks are designed to be redundant, keeping the vehicle mobile with more than half a group gone. Sorrel wryly mentions that she had nothing much to do whilst waiting for a rescue that seemed... rather unlikely… so she had a look at the vehicle records. There are no known instances of losing a whole track cluster and a lot of information on how it is prevented. She concluded that either she has been super-unlucky or the constructors failed to mention something.

Sorrel and Kaigh got the ATV under cover and tried to use the robots to make repairs. That resulted in a bunch of busted robots and not much else. They have taken shelter in the vehicle's survival citadel and… kinda just waited to become one with the universe – only now the Travellers have showed up and maybe there is a way out. She can remind them about the nuclear dampers, which will create a safe working space close to the vehicles. The equipment aboard her ATV is important and there will be no chance to recover it later. Sorrel asks the Travellers for assistance in transferring a few items after which she will be very glad to get back to the Fuller Installation.

THE RESCUE

Moving items between the ATVs is not all that risky, although conditions are sufficient to make anyone nervous. Suits can cope with the heat in the shade, at least for a while, and the two vehicles' nuclear dampers will protect against radiation providing the Travellers remain close. There is a fair amount of mobile scientific instrumentation to be moved, which necessitates carrying by hand, and a few components that can be removed from the crippled ATV for salvage.

The operation has been ongoing for a while when disaster strikes. Any Travellers who have absolutely refused to leave the safety of their vehicle will be aboard it but anyone else has a chance to be outside. If – for some reason – the Travellers have presented a detailed timetable of who is to be where at any given time, the Referee can pick a moment and use it to determine who is affected. Likewise, if the Travellers have established a protocol such as always moving in pairs or only having two people out at once then this will serve to indicate who is endangered. If not, each Traveller must roll 2D. Those who score highest are furthest from safety.

The other ATV is the most dangerous place to be. The Traveller with the highest result is inside with Sorrel. If there is some reason why this is impossible then Sorrel will be alone. Either way she is removing equipment to be passed back to the other ATV and is caught inside at the critical moment.

The next-highest scoring Traveller is close to the other ATV, along with Kaigh. They may be going there or coming back, or passing items out as Sorrel detaches them. Others will be at various points on the short walk between the two ATVs, whilst the lowest-scoring Traveller is inside their own ATV and safe. The first indication that anything is wrong is a sharp rise in radiation levels; nothing dangerous but alarming. This is rapidly followed by an alarm in the Travellers' ATV. It appears that the nuclear dampers in the other ATV are malfunctioning and their wildly fluctuating field is interfering with the damping effect of the Travellers' own ATV. Expected time to failure is less than a minute.

Anyone in the ATV can attempt to stabilise the field. This requires an Average (8+) Electronics (sensors) or Gunner (screens) check to come up with a solution on the fly. It is not possible to stabilise the other ATV remotely and if its field fails anyone aboard or close to it will be exposed to lethal radiation within seconds. The obvious solution is for everyone to rush to the Travellers' ATV. If they can get close enough to be within its field they should be safe.

This scene can play out in a variety of ways. Unless the Travellers do something to prevent it, Kaigh runs the wrong way – into her ATV rather than the Travellers' – shouting something about being able to solve the problem. Radio comms are still very patchy even at this short distance and in any case there is likely to be quite the babble on the channel, making it difficult to figure out what she said. Sorrel starts to exit the vehicle then changes her mind, going back to help Kaigh. For a moment it seems like they might actually succeed, as the field stabilises, then Sorrel's voice comes – oddly clearly – over the radio. 'We've lost it. Run.'

The most distant Travellers have just long enough to scramble back to their ATV as the field collapses. It seems that some of them might not make it in time but the Sorrel's ATV's damper field rallies again and again, spiking in strength then dropping again; more and steeper after each peak. Finally it gives out completely and lights start to flicker and go out on the other ATV as its systems are disrupted by ionising radiation. There is nothing the Travellers can do from their position and even as they start looking for a solution the airlock of the other ATV opens and two figures clamber out. They begin walking slowly, very close together, towards the ATV.

Anyone who knows about radiation effects is likely to be horrified at what is happening. Assuming their suits somehow keep functioning long enough, Sorrel and Kaigh will get to the Travellers' ATV but they will have received a fatal dose. Radiation poisoning is usually a long, slow death, so what is walking towards the Travellers is essentially two corpses that have not fallen down yet. They cannot possibly survive but have chosen a slow death among friends over a quicker one in the dead ATV. A grim choice but there were no good options.

Sorrel and Kaigh are clinging on to one another but not for support. There is no sign they are suffering any ill-effects yet but that is to be expected. Once within the damper zone they move apart and head for the airlock. Sorrel's cheery voice breaks through on the radio: 'Sorry, Kaigh really thought she could fix that. Dumbass.'

Kaigh is silent. The Travellers may be worried about allowing the two aboard since they are surely heavily irradiated, but the airlock's sensors read them as clean. That, and the fact their suits continued to function, might puzzle the Travellers. Sorrel provides an answer of sorts by holding up a jewel similar to the one she sent the Travellers. 'So, this thing. I'll fill you in once I'm out of this suit.'

If the Travellers refuse to allow Sorrel and Kaigh aboard they will survive longer than would normally be expected but there will be no rescue. Abandoning them on the assumption they were dangerously irradiated is not unreasonable and any inquiry will find that the Travellers did not commit any crime by protecting themselves from a presumed threat. However, events at Fuller will fall out much the same way whether Sorrel is present or not.

HEADING FOR HELL

With the rescue attempt completed, one way or another, the Travellers can resume their journey to the Fuller Experimental Mining Installation. Sorrel and Kaigh will react differently to their ordeal. Kaigh is convinced she has received a fatal dose and is expecting to die a horrible death. She will want the Travellers to perform medical tests and repeat them, unable to believe that she is somehow going to live. Sorrel is less concerned, as she expected the Ancients jewel to protect her from the intense radiation but even so she is clearly a bit rattled.

The Travellers will be able to get an account of the ATV disaster out of Sorrel and Kaigh, although it may be garbled and in the wrong order. Their mission was as dangerous as any other and the risks were well managed. Neither has any explanation for the track failure but vehicles have been lost before and everyone accepts they operate in a hazardous environment. The 'big one' referred to is a strange object of artificial origin, resembling a metal rod projecting up from the planetary crust to a height of about 12 metres. It is wider and longer than the others – there are several – and has been the source of samples including the ones Sorrel sent to the Travellers.

Sorrel tells the Travellers that the rod is assumed to have been left by the Ancients, earning her a sharp glance from Kaigh. Apparently discussing such matters with outsiders is frowned upon. The function of the rod is unknown but every now and then experiments are conducted, such as feeding electrical signals into it, and minor changes have been observed. This was what Sorrel and Kaigh were doing this time out; trying out pulses and waves of varying amplitude. Their results are stored in the devices recovered from the ATV.

The jewel Sorrel has is very much like the one she sent to the Travellers. She has figured out it absorbs energy in some manner, notably ionising radiation, and was sure… well, pretty sure… that it would protect her and anyone very close. She appears to have been correct. In fact, a Traveller standing outside in a vacc suit on Calefaction would still be cooked by stellar heating if they left the shade but they would not be hurt by the solar radiation. More importantly, their electronic equipment would not be overloaded. This effect covers a roughly two metre sphere around the jewel. Sorrel has figured this out by way of some very dangerous experimentation.

There is not all that much more Sorrel and Kaigh can tell the Travellers. They will confirm that the researchers at Fuller are also investigating the rods and Sorrel adds that she found the jewel embedded in one of the rods. There was a recess clearly designed to hold it. Kaigh did not know she had it and can barely conceal her impatience to find out what else Sorrel has or knows. She is disinclined to discuss the Ancients in front of the Travellers, however.

If the Travellers found the time to take a look at the ATV's tracks they will find that the manufacturer's claims are valid – the way they are constructed means there is virtually no chance of a complete failure unless maintenance was neglected. It would be expected that the vehicle is always inspected before setting out. Sorrel will confirm that it is; she and Kaigh went over it the shift before their expedition, as is standard practice. There was no sign of a defect, yet inspection of track segments shows that some of them have suffered damage inconsistent with wear or heating.

Grinding across the hot surface has obliterated most of the evidence but it appears the track cluster was undamaged at the time Sorrel set out, yet suffered a catastrophic failure. There is melting but more like that caused by an explosion. The track mounts also show signs of a blast. The Travellers may be able to figure out that the tracks were destroyed by an improvised compound which became volatile when it had absorbed enough heat; effectively a temperature-activated bomb. Clearly someone wanted the mission to fail, or the ATV crew dead, or both.

SORREL AND KAIGH

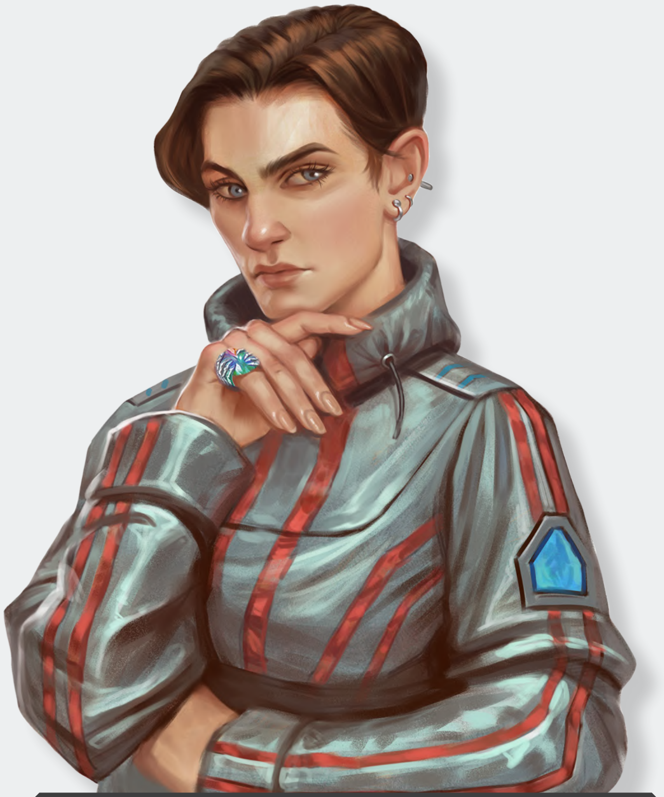
Sorrel seems to be exactly the way she was when the Travellers knew her previously. Some of her mannerisms and speech patterns have changed a little but that is normal over time and in any case she is deeply scared by what just happened. In short there is no sign that she is any sort of threat to anyone – except maybe whoever sabotaged her vehicle. If sabotage is suspected Sorrel will naturally be angry and try to figure out who might have done something like this.

There is nothing to suggest that Sorrel now has a plan to destroy the planet. She has become a quiet fanatic, working towards a goal that seems eminently sensible and 'right'. At the same time she is aware that others might not be so enlightened and could try to stop her. She naturally suspects the ATV incident was intended to prevent her carrying out her plan and the fortuitous arrival of the Travellers must therefore have been the will of her god. However, that does not mean they are aware of their role in the great plan, so Sorrel will bide her time and observe before revealing anything.

If the Travellers ask about the jewels, Sorrel is candid. They were found embedded in some of the strange rods close to the Fuller installation. They could not be freed by some people but for others they came loose with a touch. Sorrel has no idea if any of these people were psionic; she certainly is not. Sorrel believes they are of Ancients origin and suspects that the original operators of the Fuller installation built it here in order to study the rods rather than for the installation's stated purpose. Only a handful of the researchers know about the jewels, although everyone is aware of the rods. Since nobody but Sorrel has been able to make head nor tail of the rod samples and the jewels, they were put in storage.

A total of five jewels were found. Sorrel has one and the Travellers were sent another. Three remain in storage and nobody at the installation knows that more than three were found. The exception to this is Kaigh, who has just found out and has many questions. Since Sorrel and her jewel saved Kaigh's life she is favourably inclined and likely to want one for herself.

Kaigh is a technical assistant at Fuller, specialising in sensor and communications systems. She does not know about the Ancients connection but like everyone else she is curious about the rods. Kaigh will have a lot of questions but initially her concern is whether or not she has absorbed too much radiation. She will provide information if the Travellers ask the right questions but she does not know much and tends to respond in an offhand, distracted manner before returning to the far more important (to her) topic of whether she is going to die. The Travellers might find her irritating but her response is natural. Once she calms down a bit Kaigh could be a good ally for the Travellers. How they treat her will determine whether she actively helps them or looks out for her own interests.



SORREL TERGAII

SPECIES		GENDER		AGE
Human		Female		42

TRAITS			—	SKILLS
STR	7	INT	8	Athletics (dexterity) 1, Deception 1, Electronics (computers) 2, Electronics (remote ops) 2, Gun Combat 0, Investigate 1, Mechanic 1, Vacc Suit 2
DEX	9	EDU	9	
END	8	SOC	6	

WEAPONS:	LiteBeam 6L Heavy Laser Pistol (4D+1)
ARMOUR:	None but the jewel provides Protection +2D against energy attacks
EQUIPMENT:	Sorrel has the missing wristband from the Fuller Installation command office. She does not wear it openly, since she has given herself command-level security access. She might even give it to a Traveller in order to solve some problem if it suits her overall purpose

SORREL TERGAII (RESEARCH ASSISTANT)

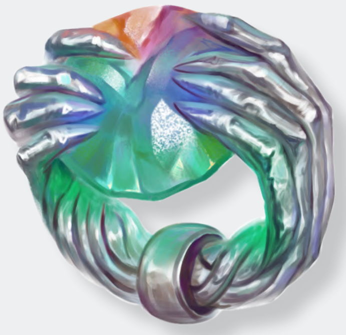
Sorrel is an old contact of the Travellers and remains friendly towards them despite the changes she has undergone. Her background is complex and mysterious, including a series of jobs on the fringes of legality. The Travellers will probably have some idea about her skillset but may or may not know she is capable of reprogramming the robots. She may volunteer this information by offering to help get them back under control but obviously will not admit she reprogrammed them in the first place.

Sorrel is now a True Believer of the worst sort, yet remains a basically decent person. She is absolutely certain that destroying Calefaction and everyone on it is the right thing to do. At the same time, she would prefer her friends to escape if they can and will encourage them to leave. They might even come to think she intends some self-sacrificial action to stop what has been set in motion – if the Referee can make the Travellers think she is trying to prevent planetary destruction they may even become unwitting accomplices.

Sorrel joined the research team some time ago as an assistant. Her field was mostly technical – dealing with computer issues, data analysis, robot-wrangling and vehicle operations. As a facilitator of pretty much everyone's work she had a good insight into what was happening. Her original mission was on behalf of a corporation interested in the research being carried out at Fuller. Whether this might eventually have led to a data theft is an open question, since Sorrel became side-tracked by her new religious mission.

Sorrel will do almost anything to complete her mission and feels that the ends absolutely do justify the means. She will deceive the Travellers but would only try to harm them as an absolute last resort. Indeed, she will risk her own safety to help them and can see no contradictions there. Depending on how the adventure plays out, the Travellers may have come to be genuinely fond of Sorrel by the time they discover what she has done. If the Travellers directly oppose Sorrel they will find she is not very 'fighty' at all. However, she is quite capable of leading the Travellers into a trap and allowing the environment or robots to deal with them.

Sorrel has a laser pistol, identical to the one she sent the Travellers, concealed in an unusual way. It is loaded with six energy cartridges, with no reloads carried. Sorrel has more ammunition in her quarters but the way she carries the weapon does not allow anything else to be with it. Sorrel's gun is 'somewhere else', perhaps in an alternate dimension or a pocket universe, accessed through a small gem-like object set into a ring she wears. The ring itself is commonplace and inexpensive but the jewel is an ancients Artefact known as a container-of-one. Essentially it is a teleporter which will bring a single object of up to four kilograms mass into the owner's hand and send it back to storage at will. Sorrel has learned to use this device but will deploy her weapon only in the most dire emergency. She does not like direct, violent solutions and is not a very good shot.

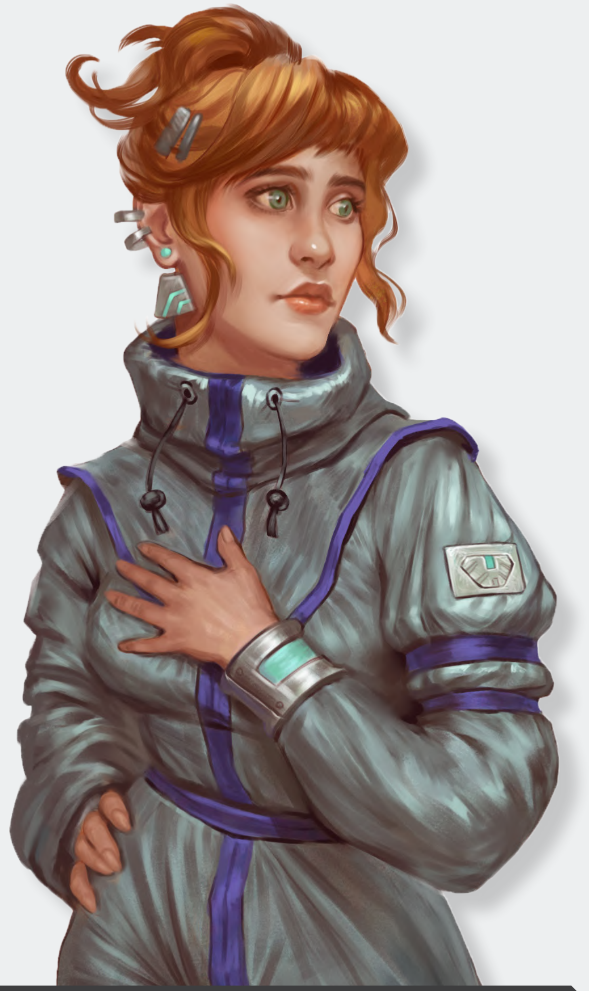


Item	TL	Kg	Cost
Container-of-One	25?	—	Priceless

KAIGH HUSAK (TECHNICAL ASSISTANT)

Kaigh joined the crew at Fuller in much the same way as Sorrel. She was looking for a well-paid job that would take her out of circulation for a while. She is vague about the specifics but there is nothing criminal about her; she went through a bad breakup which led to her former partner's family harassing her and interfering in efforts to find a decent job and make a new start. Fuller seemed like a good option, letting the family cool off whilst at the same time building up enough reserves to move far away.

Fuller turned out to be an agreeable place to work and Kaigh was considering a second day/night cycle before leaving. Her role was somewhere between generalist research assistant and electronics technician. As such, she knew about the security robots and performed maintenance on them from time-to-time. She had nothing to do with them being reprogrammed, however, and does not know that Sorrel is aware of their existence.



KAIGH HUSAK

SPECIES	GENDER	AGE
Human	Female	24

TRAITS			—	SKILLS
STR	7	INT	8	Drive (track) 1, Electronics (sensors) 3, Mechanic 1, Vacc Suit 1
DEX	8	EDU	9	
END	5	SOC	6	

Kaigh was aware of the increasing eccentricity of some of the staff but 'this place' – as she refers to Fuller – can do that to people. She noted that some of the staff disappeared from time-to-time but thought nothing of it. Affairs between co-workers were nothing to do with Kaigh; nor were the foibles of obsessed researchers who just had to pursue an idea in the middle of the night. It was not uncommon to find someone asleep at a terminal with scribbled notes all over the floor, or for them to go running through a work area shouting for someone to check their calculations. Kaigh took little notice and just did her job.

FULLER EXPERIMENTAL MINING INSTALLATION (HELL)

Fuller Experimental Mining Installation is significantly larger than the other outlying settlements and was built to be permanent. Ostensibly its purpose is to study the local conditions but whilst this is an ongoing concern there is another purpose to the facility; surveys of the area surrounding Shelter Canyon indicated strange concentrations of unknown materials. Confirmation took a very long time, given the difficulty of operating under the prevailing conditions, but it was established that a pattern of long metallic rods had been created in the area. These ran down from the surface to an unknown depth and could not possibly be natural.

The scientists at Fuller are investigating the rods as well as the subjects they were originally deployed for. Some of them have stayed for several rotations or taken a break then returned. It is commonly stated that if someone who begins tour at Hell is not already eccentric, they will be by the time they return to civilisation. There is some truth in this but the difficulty of finding qualified people willing to work in such a place forces a certain degree of tolerance.

Unlike Shelter Canyon, the Fuller installation is built in large blocks. The bedrock in this area is less prone to stresses and quakes than at the pole, which is always between the hot and cold faces. Away from the poles, the ground is heated then cools in a more even cycle. Even so, astute Travellers with a background in planetology may realise that the area is unusually stable. Further investigation, once data is available, indicates that the rock does not get as hot as other areas exposed to the same amount of stellar radiation, and does not cool so much during the night phase as similar areas. Discovering this is likely to require access to temperature data at the installation itself.

The reason for this strange situation is an irregular pattern of rods, most about 2.6 metres in diameter, running down from the surface. The heads of the rods are more or less flat, with an irregular pattern of ridges and troughs. There is nothing to suggest these are anything other than a feature of the rods' manufacture but anyone looking at them gets a feeling that the pattern is deliberate and might mean something. They may even feel compelled to look at other rods and figure out the pattern. The compulsion is easy enough to resist but it is a weird nagging sensation which has caused some researchers to take risks in order to get just one look at the rods.

The rods are made from the same material the Travellers were sent and indeed the one closest to the installation has fragments missing from its head. These were chipped away during the dark cycle, at great cost in tools and effort. They have defied investigation, other than the researchers establishing the rods are made of a highly exotic mostly-metallic material arranged in a honeycomb structure, and pass heat along their length in an unexplained manner.

THE RODS

This is, as the Travellers might expect, an Ancients site. Their experimentation covered a vast array of subjects and in this case they were interested in the effects of close proximity to a dying giant star – just as the humans who came here much later are interested. The Ancients had vastly more advanced technology available and a sense of entitlement to mess about with the universe in general. The rods were driven deep into the crust – tens of kilometres – and served as conduits for sensor data.

The Ancients were not content with studying what happened to Calefaction. They also conducted what-if experiments. Could the planetary crust be stabilised by reducing the heating and cooling cycle? Could stability be disrupted by doing the opposite? It may be that the Ancients were trying to figure out if they could create a hiding-place where nobody would think to look for them, or perhaps they were investigating new ways to destroy a planet.

It is not clear from what the Ancients left behind on Calefaction what they were trying to do, or why. All that is certain is that they came here and did something… then left. The researchers at Fuller have figured out some of what happened here, and Sorrel has combined that information into a sinister plan. This will become apparent to the Travellers but possibly too late to prevent a catastrophe.

FULLER INSTALLATION

The main part of the Fuller Experimental Mining Installation takes the form of a cone, with sloping outer surfaces coated in reflective material to reduce heat absorption. A second, narrower conical structure stands close by. The installation is partially shaded by nearby rock outcroppings, with shadows moving across its surface as the long day passes. At ground level there is a cut-out, overhung by the level above, allowing crawlers to move into the shade of the upper levels before entering the garage. There is an additional full level above this, plus two narrower 'tower' levels.

The installation's communications equipment is subject to electromagnetic interference. Even the meson communicator is intermittent and patchy. However, radio-frequency equipment will work well enough within about a kilometre of the installation and might get through with a struggle out to about five kilometres. Laser comms will work anywhere there is line of sight but they have to be aimed which means searching for a target and hitting it with a laser in extremely harsh conditions. Close to the station – within 250 metres or so – radiation levels begin to drop abruptly. Within 100 metres or so, dosage drops to about 100 rads per hour. A good personal suit will protect against this level of radiation, although there is still heat to contend with. This reduction is due to the constant activity of the station's nuclear dampers and ceases the instant they are turned off.

The outer walls of the installation are made from very thick Loscom, of an unusually dense composition. The installation was set up during a night cycle, using locally sourced materials whose content proved suitably resistant to radiation and heating. The only opening at ground level is the main entrance, located in the cut-out part of the ground level. Atop this is an upper level, shaped as a circle. Part of this overhangs the cut-out, shading the entry area. Rather than a cone like the rest of the level, it is flattened off to allow grav vehicles to land. This rarely happens, since they tend to malfunction on Calefaction, but the builders did not fully appreciate the severity of conditions when they began work. Atop the upper floors are the two tower levels, both circular in cross-section and tapering as a cone. The very top of the tower houses armoured communications lasers and antennae, all of which are protected by a silvered awning when deployed, and retracted into their housings when not in use.

Instruments tend to white out in daytime conditions on Calefaction but a thermal map of the area could be put together over time. If so, the Travellers will note a temperature differential between the area within the rod pattern and outside it. What is not immediately apparent is that there is a pattern of reflector/emitter panels situated in a circle around 200 metres out from the installation. These are used to get rid of stored heat during a night cycle. During the day they are in the shade so are capable of venting a little heat. This would ordinarily not be enough to make much difference during the day but due to the cooling effect of the rods it is more significant than might be expected. The radiator panels are noticeably hotter than their surroundings even during the day, which might pique the Travellers' interest if they notice.

CONDITIONS AND ACCESS

The Fuller Installation is internally compartmentalised and also has security features on its doors. Almost all of this was disabled within hours of the place becoming operational. Apart from sensitive and dangerous areas, convenience was considered more important than security – especially at an installation in such an isolated location. For the most part it is possible to wander around unhindered.

In general, the installation is characterised by working clutter. Many areas are messy when in use, then cleared up before the next project is begun. However, this is not taken to extremes. It is not uncommon to find a half-eaten sandwich lying in someone's laboratory space but it will be no more than a few hours old. The staff are undisciplined compared to a military base but they work in a dangerous environment and have decent enough working habits.

The installation has a decentralised computer network, with servers in most operating areas. These are all interconnected but are typically tasked with handling nearby systems or activities. Thus the computer equipment in the laboratory area normally handles scientific tasks and the systems close to the communications gear run its software. All systems are interconnected, with certain exceptions, and access to most routine data is unprotected. Since access requires physical presence within the installation, this is considered an adequate level of security.

Access Levels

Activity	Availability	Notes
Access to routine information such as external and internal temperature, whereabouts of personnel, supply levels and similar day-to-day data.	Any user, any terminal.	Most general-use terminals are unsecured and can be used by anyone.
Access to scientific data and ongoing research.	User-specific, typically coded to biometrics or voice recognition. Generally-available terminals will shut down access after a time but personal terminals may have been set to remain constantly logged in.	General research data is typically available to any station staff member upon request. Specific projects and sensitive data are only available to their originator and anyone they have granted access to.
Access to detailed installation logs, personnel notes and other sensitive data.	Command personnel or relevant specialists, usually their personal or working terminal only.	Gaining access to this data is much more difficult than even the scientific information. Command and specialist personnel tend to have better data protection habits than researchers.
Backups to external devices.	Any data an individual has access to can be backed up from any terminal, for example to a portacomp or personal data device. However, special access is required typically based on biometrics and the backup is logged and flagged.	Transferring data out of the main system is restricted, mainly to protect the research ongoing at the installation.
Deletion or alteration of any data.	Any user can amend their own working files but all versions are permanently retained unless deleted. Deletion can only be carried out in the main computer chamber and requires Command level access.	The system is set up to make access easy for users but to prevent data loss in the case of an error. The intent was to prevent a researcher from deleting a week's worth of work after having a late-night realisation that everything they had done was wrong, or some similar scenario, but it also serves to prevent data sabotage.

BIOMECHS PRODUC
BIOMECHS PRODUCTIONS
DANGER AREA
326
57%

Access Levels

Access Levels	Example	Notes
Unsecured	Common areas, recreation spaces, some non-critical stores such as the galley's ready meal stash.	Much of the installation is unsecured but can be instantly switched to Staff only access if necessary.
Staff	Commonly used working areas, such as the laboratory complex, workshops or stores. Most internal doors are Staff access secured.	Access is granted to all registered installation personnel. Temporary visitors can be assigned equivalent status, set to lapse after a time.
Specific	Personal areas such as living quarters, sensitive or complex equipment, critical systems such as the reactors. Structural type doors such as those of the vehicle bay.	Specific individuals can be assigned access as needed. Many areas normally requiring specific access have been downgraded to Staff due to the low perceived security threat.
Command	The tower and external doors require Command access.	Elsewhere, Command level access might be required in more areas but the Fuller installation's circumstances make this seem unnecessary. Any system or door can be set to Command access only from the main control room.

Backups are shared throughout the system and also downloaded to a data vault which does not permit alterations. All other systems allow alterations and deletion of data but this is restricted to certain personnel. In general the system will allow anyone within the installation to access routine data but research and sensitive logs have security measures in place, as does deletion or alteration. It is not possible to make backups of any information to a device outside the main computer system without special access.

Getting access to the computer system is not difficult. The installation's remote location was considered to make most security measures unnecessary. Someone with Command level access can set up an account for anyone else, granting complete access – and control over the installation's systems if they choose. This can only be done from the main computer chamber, however.

It is also possible to spoof the system in various ways. There is an emergency protocol whereby access devolves if key personnel are incapacitated. This can be triggered by convincing the system that all Command level personnel are dead or otherwise out of action – this does not have to be true but the system has to believe it. Faked medical readouts from the sick bay might suffice, or other tricks designed to fool the system. If this occurs, Command access is passed to any registered personnel who request it – but this must be done in the computer chamber or the command office. Anyone not already noted as a member of staff will be excluded.

There are ways to get registered, other than having an account set up by a Command level individual. An unsecured personal terminal could be reprogrammed with someone else's biometrics, making the whole system think the Traveller is that researcher. Alternatively it could be used to insert a fake identity onto the system. The key to getting into the system is to find a terminal that has been set up not to log its user out. None of the publicly accessible terminals are in such a state but at least one of the personal systems has been left on. The Travellers will have to find it, however. Alternatively, a straight hacking job could be attempted by suitably skilled Travellers.

Access within the installation is similar to computer and data access. There are three levels of access – Staff, Specific and Command. Many areas are totally unsecured, inasmuch as doors will open automatically when anyone approaches them. Others require only that a visitor hits the manual open pad. Doors and entryways through major structural components like Loscom walls never open automatically and require a deliberate manual command which is logged and may be flagged depending on circumstances. Such doors will automatically close after a pre-set time – usually three minutes – unless blocked or instructed to remain open. Users are required to enter a period for the door to remain open, or to keep manually commanding it to do so. This is one of the few areas where the installation is strict.

Most other internal doors are just that. They can be forced with enough effort and are generally set up for either full access by anyone or a specific level of access. Access levels can be altered by Command level staff. Note that higher-level access rights will override lower security. Thus the installation commander can force an individual's dwelling door to open.

BREACHING SECURITY

Doors through major structural elements cannot be forced using any equipment available within the installation but can be cut with starship-grade tools. None are present at Fuller but the Travellers might be able to improvise something – perhaps using components from the ore furnace. Lighter doors can be smashed or forced off their mountings. However, this will compromise internal environmental security, so perhaps a less direct method is in order.

If the Travellers can get access to the main computer room and into the system they can directly control the security settings for the installation or set themselves up as Command level accounts. Alternatively, doors can be controlled from their security panels by fiddling with the electronics. A Traveller who successfully gets into the electronics of the system can decide what they want the door to do – open once, lock shut and ignore commands, revert to manual control or whatever else the Traveller prefers.

Doing this for a standard internal door takes 1D minutes and requires a successful Difficult (10+) Electronics (computers) check. Travellers can make a case for using Electronics (comms) or Electronics (sensors) instead depending on the approach they are taking.

Doors piercing structural elements, such as those separating the vehicle garage from the laboratory area, are much harder to get into. It will usually be necessary to cut into the armoured security panel before beginning any electronics work. This adds an additional 1D minutes to the task assuming a suitable tool is available. Cutting into a security panel is much easier than attacking the door itself but will leave rather obvious damage.

PERSONNEL

Information on staffing levels at Fuller is contained in the database at Shelter Canyon, if the Travellers thought to look. Sorrel and Haigh can also provide a quick rundown of the situation. The installation was built to house a staff of over 40 researchers and support workers but in practice it has never had more than 25 people at any one time. There is a command hierarchy, which is rather flat. Post titles are rather corporate, with the installation manager being in overall charge. Below the command level personnel are rated as 'staff' or 'senior staff'. The latter supervise those within their own field of expertise and generally have one or more specific access clearances in addition to their general staff access.

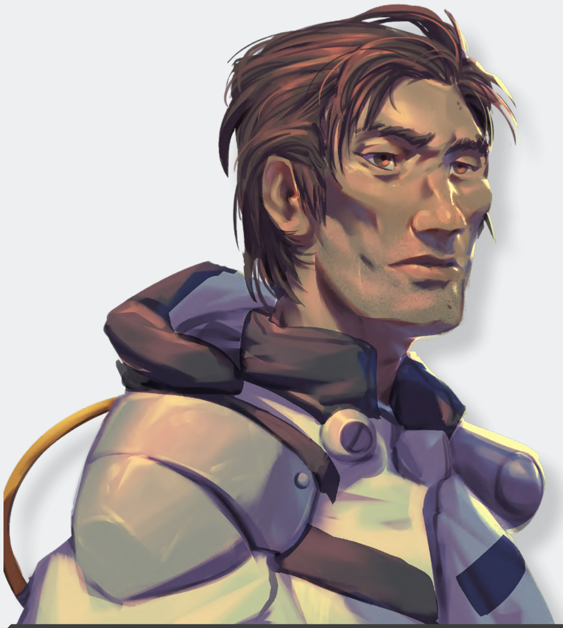
The Travellers will not interact with most of these people. Some are dead and most have left in the EAV. Only three members of the installation staff remain alive and inside the structure, to be joined by Kaigh and Sorrel.

FINISTERRE SUMMER (ENVIRONMENTAL SYSTEMS MANAGER)

Finisterre Summer was an engineering manager at a completely safe arcology. Bored witless after 20 years, he took the job of running the plant at Fuller about five years ago and is the longest-serving member of staff. He has never left in all that time and is considering retiring to spend the gigantic wad of cash he has built up for lack of anywhere to spend it.

Finisterre is a typical middle-aged engineer. He is very good at what he does and can apply his engineering methodology to problem-solving. However, he is not accustomed to danger and will be very reluctant to do anything other than the safest option. There is no conflict between this attitude and a job in Hell – Finisterre has spent his whole life keeping bad things on the far side of a comfortingly thick wall.

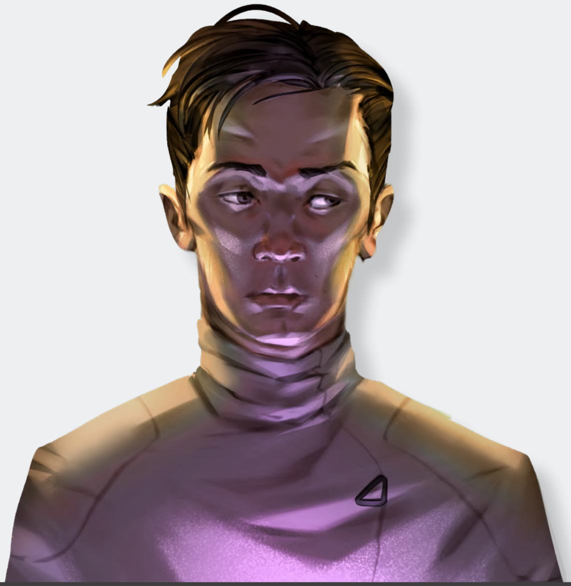
The present situation is shocking and overwhelming for Finisterre. He has seen friends gunned down by security robots he thought inactive and reacted by running away to hide. His account of what happened is confused, contradictory and patchy but this is not due to any deliberate deception – he is suffering from jumbled memories as a result of recent trauma.



FINISTERRE SUMMER

SPECIES	GENDER	AGE
Human	Male	47

TRAITS			—	SKILLS
STR	4	INT	10	Electronics (computers) 2, Electronics (remote ops) 1, Engineer (life support) 4, Mechanic 3, Vacc Suit 0
DEX	7	EDU	9	
END	6	SOC	8	



VAUGHAN CLEMENS

SPECIES	GENDER	AGE
Human	Male	20

TRAITS			—	SKILLS
STR	6	INT	10	Electronics (comms) 1, Science (astrophysics) 2, Vacc Suit 0
DEX	5	EDU	11	
END	8	SOC	7	

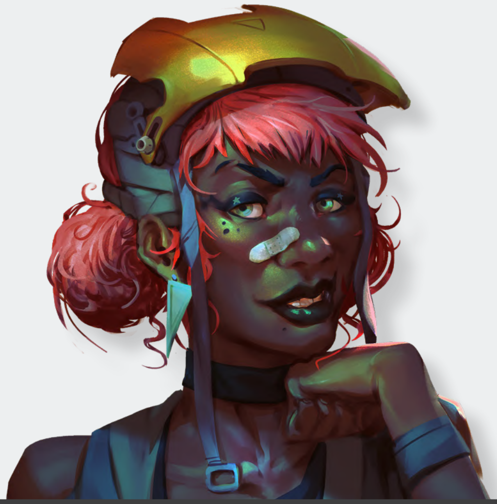
The Travellers might suspect Finisterre due to his incoherent account of what happened and his ability to programme the robots. His reluctance to help is due to fear but the Travellers might think it something else. Finisterre knows nothing about the Church of Stellar Divinity among the researchers.

VAUGHAN CLEMENS (SPACE SCIENTIST)

Vaughan is the youngest and least qualified of the scientists at the station, 'merely' holding a bachelor's degree in astrophysics. He arrived near the end of the last night cycle, as a last-minute replacement for one of the existing researchers. Travellers may realise this looks like an intelligence-services insertion, carried out by making the installation take whatever personnel it can get. In fact, it was just happenstance.

Vaughan never really met his peers' expectations and there are numerous log entries referring to him being little more use than an unqualified assistant. This is unfair; he is merely inexperienced and unused to operating in a practical environment rather than the more guided circumstances of an undergraduate course in a university. As a result he never really fit in at Fuller and has a certain amount of resentment towards many of his colleagues. He had suspicions – correctly – that some of the researchers were 'up to something'. He never found out about it but came close to discovering the existence of the Church of Stellar Divinity. It is perhaps unfortunate that he did not; they would probably have welcomed him and been the friendship group he needed. Instead, Vaughan is a loner doing an adequate but under-appreciated job.

As a result of his treatment and slight paranoia, Vaughan is not inclined to be particularly helpful. He just wants to get away from the Fuller installation and will either pester the Travellers about it or find a safe place to wait nervously for them to 'do something'. His behaviour might seem suspicious, since he is rarely present when anything happens. The Referee might use Vaughan as a red herring in this manner.



KELLYS PARROE

SPECIES	GENDER	AGE
Human	Female	29

TRAITS			—	SKILLS
STR	9	INT	7	Athletics (endurance) 1, Carouse 1, Drive (track) 2, Electronics (sensors) 1, Gun Combat (slug) 1, Jack-of-all-Trades 1, Mechanic 1, Navigation 1, Recon 1, Vacc Suit 2
DEX	8	EDU	7	
END	9	SOC	6	

KELLYS PARROE (SUPPORT STAFF)

Kellys has been on Calefaction through three day/night cycles, working as a general support assistant. Her duties range from food preparation to vehicle crew on surface expeditions. Although quiet and unassuming, she is one of those get-things-done people who can see the way to the target but are happy to facilitate others making the big glorious effort. The staff at Fuller probably never realised how much they owed to Kellys being in the right place with the right tools or a desperately needed hot meal. Those that did figure it out would describe her as the glue that held the Fuller installation together.

After serving a mandatory term in her homeworld armed forces, Kellys traded her mustering out pay for a ticket offworld. It was the right decision; she got to spend years working her way across the sector seeing things the folks back home would not believe. Fuller was supposed to be a few months of work to replenish her bank balance but something about the place suited Kellys. Eventually she realised it was the system's star that was calling to her.

Kellys was the first convert to the Church of Stellar Divinity. If anyone thinks to rake through the archives, she did a lot of data searches on the subject a night-cycle ago. Nobody else has done this; Kellys provided all the materials the others needed and also built the shrine. Her first and most fervent convert was the senior space scientist at the installation, and Kellys was quite happy to allow him to slip into the role of priest for the others. It is simply not her way to be in the front rank – achieving the goal is all that matters.

Unlike Sorrel, Kellys is not a planet-destroying zealot. She is a fervent adherent of the Church of Stellar Divinity and will readily admit this if the subject comes up in a non-hostile way. She knows better than to give out information to pushy strangers however, and will become cagy if the Travellers pique her suspicions. She will show the shrine to those who seem interested and conceal its existence from anyone she mistrusts.

ROBOTS AT FULLER INSTALLATION

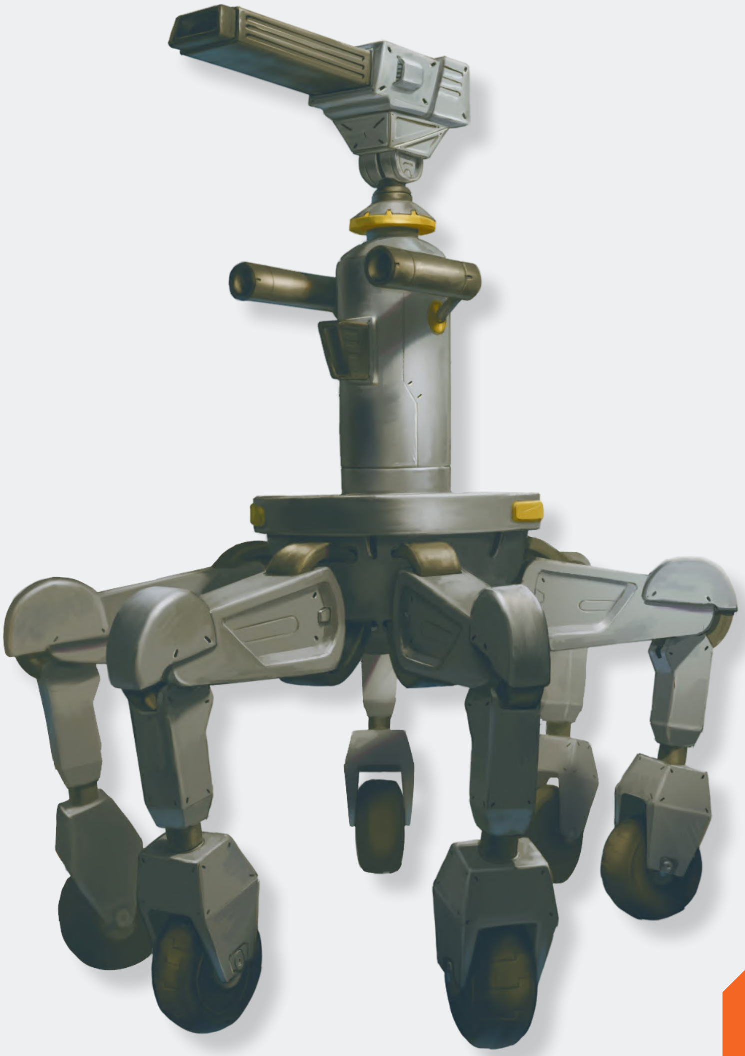
The installation has a complement of robotic helpers, most of which can only function inside the structure. Technical assistance robots and fetch-and-carry platforms are housed in their own maintenance cubicles throughout the installation, whilst those intended for operations outside are based in the vehicle garage. Unknown to many of the staff, the installation was given a contingent of security robots. These are armed with lethal weaponry as well as stunners, which is usually illegal in Imperial space. For this reason the security robots are normally confined to their cubicles. Most staff think these are either full of spares or machines that have not yet been needed, or perhaps are empty. The presence of armed security robots was originally known only to Command level staff.

The exact number of robots can be tailored to the Travellers' capabilities. A group that prefers stealth and bypassing problems might have to deal with only two per floor but if the Travellers like a good gunfight the Referee can add more robots. All robots are active when the Travellers arrive but may be concealed or powered-down. They are capable of autonomous operation and share data through the installation's computer and internal camera system.

The robots are not necessarily hostile to new arrivals but may become so if triggered. They will usually remain on their assigned floors but might use the lifts to concentrate against a major threat. Anyone cutting or otherwise attempting to physically breach a door, or tampering with sensitive equipment such as life support and cooling, will trigger the robots' standard programming. This is to protect the installation and its personnel from all threats, which means the robots will shoot to kill if necessary to stop someone breaching an external door or crippling the nuclear dampers. They will use their less-lethal weapons by preference, however, unless attacked.

The robots have been reprogrammed – imperfectly – with a secondary mission. They are to prevent interference with the Sorrel's attempt to activate the rods, and authorised to use lethal force if necessary. The robots' imperfect programming means they might not recognise some actions as a threat, or may misconstrue something as simple as walking past the wrong control panel and open fire. They have access to a great deal of information but are not tactically very savvy. Thus it is possible to cause all the robots on one level to charge directly towards a perceived threat, allowing others to slip past them, or to draw one into a trap. Once they have identified any individual as hostile they will attack without warning but may not pursue a retreating foe if their orders to protect Sorrel's endeavour override their security function.

The robots are simple in design. Their chassis runs on six independently powered and steered wheels, with a cylindrical central pillar standing one metre high. This is topped by a turret mounting a laser carbine and a stunner, with a one-shot grenade launcher on each side of the central pillar. These usually carry one sleep gas grenade and one concussion grenade.



Robot	Hits	Locomotion	Speed	TL	Cost
Internal Security Robot	20	Wheels	6 m	12	Cr74000

Skills	Gun Combat (Energy) 1, Heavy Weapons (portable) 1, Recon 2
Attacks	Laser Carbine (4D+3, Zero-G), Stunner (3D Stun, Zero-G), Grenade launcher (x2) (varies)
Manipulators	none
Endurance	97 hours
Traits	Armour (+8), IR Vision
Programming	Hunter/Killer (standard) (INT 4)
Options	Auditory Sensor, Fire Control System (basic) x4, Light Intensifier Sensor (advanced), Recon Sensor (enhanced), Spare Slots x6, Transceiver 5 km (improved), Voder Speaker, Weapon Mount (medium) x3, Weapon Mount (small), Wireless Data Link

ARRIVING AT FULLER

As the Travellers' ATV finally approaches the Fuller Installation, the Travellers get their first look at the place. It is not all that impressive; a conical main structure with a cut-out to allow ATV access and a second, much narrower, tower close by. The Travellers will quickly become aware that something is awry. The installation does not respond to radio contact, nor is there a reply if the communications laser is used. At first this seems explainable; no supply ATV is expected and Sorrel is not due back for a good while yet so perhaps nobody is monitoring comms. The automated-response beacon works, so signals are getting through. The silence becomes worrying before the ATV enters the installation's overhang. However, there is not really anywhere else to go and the giant garage doors swing open automatically as the Travellers' vehicle approaches.

As the Travellers approach the installation, it transmits a sudden warning signal. Distorted as it is, the signal can be identified as an Evacuation In Progress alert. As the Travellers approach the cap of the smaller tower, it is blasted free and tumbles to the ground. Seconds later the Emergency Ascent Vehicle contained in the tower hurtles upward under full power. Within seconds it is away, tracing an arcing course towards the shadowed side of the planet. It is not possible to get a signal through to the vessel due to radio interference and there is no reason given for the evacuation in the alert. Telemetry indicates the installation still has air, power and a liveable environment. Its nuclear dampers are operating at full capacity. In short there is no indication of why the staff would want to leave in such a hurry.

The Travellers might simply turn around and return to Shelter Canyon, although Sorrel and perhaps Kaigh will be vocal in their desire to find out what is happening. Their reasons differ but that will not be apparent at this time. If the Travellers insist, they can slog all the way back to Shelter Canyon without investigating. They will never know why Calefaction suddenly came apart at perihelion, and might be caught on-planet when it does. More importantly they will not have the opportunity to obtain certain objects that might be useful later in the campaign.

Assuming the Travellers push on, entry into the installation is normal. Other than the lack of a communications response, there is nothing apparently wrong as the vehicle noses into the garage. The doors swing shut and a de-irradiation pulse sequence from the installation's dampers makes it safe to go outside. Coolant gases are pumped into the garage and out again, followed by breathable air. This all takes about 15 minutes, during which it is not safe to unseal the ATV. Radiation, unbreathable coolants and heat from the vehicle all conspire to make dismounting a really bad idea. By the time it is safe, Sorrel is twitching in anticipation. Something has happened, she is sure of it. She cannot wait to get into the installation and find out.

Kaigh is more cautious, to the point of being reluctant to leave the safety of the ATV. Once she thinks it is safe to enter the installation she will accompany the Travellers but flee back to the garage and hide in the ATV as soon as she sees evidence of violence. That is unlikely to be long in coming, given what has happened in her absence. Both Kaigh's reaction and Sorrel's will appear to be genuine, although for very different reasons.

CHAOS IN HELL

There were 21 personnel at Fuller, including Kaigh and Sorrel. Of these, four are now dead and 12 have escaped in the EAV. The three survivors who got left behind are hiding from the security robots. Only Command level personnel and those necessary to maintaining them had full knowledge of the robots. Senior staff knew there were security systems in place but did not have details. Notably, they were unaware that the installation had robots armed with lethal weaponry on-site. The appearance of the robots surprised everyone and nobody expected them to open fire.

The situation at Fuller has been unravelling for some months, partly due to the strain on long-service crewmembers and also the effect of the jewels on those trying to study them. An increase in irritability gradually became paranoia in some individuals, causing stress and suspicion. Most of the staff tried to put it all aside, blaming the difficult working conditions and promising themselves a long rest after their current cycle.

The catalyst for the present situation was the increasing paranoia of one of the planetary scientists, a middle-aged and generally agreeable man name Keith Ayala. Like Sorrel, he had been experimenting with the jewels and unknown to her he found another one. This is a little larger than the others and was found on the ground near one of the outer rods. Ayala fiddled with it, meditated on it and became obsessed with it. He began to see the activities of others as a threat and at one point became convinced that one of the installation personnel was a shape-changing alien plotting to kill and eat everyone.

Ironically, Ayala's paranoia led him to the correct conclusion that Sorrel was planning something grim. He kept a handwritten journal in which he rambled about her machinations when the mood took him. The journal is in his quarters, in the back of a drawer, and makes mention of 'the cult' and 'the intruder'. The latter is later denounced as a deception – 'there *is* no ravenous alien among us' Ayala writes at one point, 'but the cultists perform their rituals in secret. They do not know I am aware of them.' His final entry is: 'I must act. Forgive me, but you both must die to save us from one.'

Ayala made a bomb under the guise of experimenting with various compounds, jamming it in the ATV's track assembly after Kaigh and Sorrel had made their inspection. He knew rescue was unlikely; there was no other ATV at the installation and the supply run was not due for another few days. When it arrived, an impromptu investigation would conclude that a tragic accident had claimed two lives and Sorrel's plan – whatever it was – would be averted. He did not know what she planned but ironically his actions might have saved everyone on Calefaction had the Travellers not arrived when they did.

Keith Ayala was deranged and deluded but he was at heart a good man. He regretted what he had set in motion and confessed to some of his workmates in the hope they could figure out a way to stop the bomb from detonating or perhaps get a comms laser on the ATV and warn Sorrel. They reacted badly, as might be expected, and tried to seize him. Ayala's conviction that he had to murder Sorrel was now an equally desperate need to save her. With surprising strength for a man of his years and limited physicality, Ayala knocked down everyone in his path, hitting Vaughan Clemens so hard he broke bones in his own hand. He rushed to a comms console, pursued by a gaggle of confused researchers.

Sorrel's reprogramming of the security robots was less than perfect. The system put together Ayala's confession about sabotaging the ATV and the violence currently surrounding him, and decided he was a threat. It activated the security robots which attacked immediately. Ayala and three colleagues were gunned down in an instant; Clemens survived by virtue of being unconscious on the ground. The robots then began trying to round up the installation staff. They fired warning shots and used their concussion grenades rather than shooting to kill. Attempts to order them to stand down were partially successful but as soon as one began to return to its cubicle another would begin the process anew. The robots secured the main command areas and appeared willing to kill anyone who got near. Personnel were ordered to their quarters but discovered they could move around without interference – sometimes – and decided to make a break for the EAV. Nine of them made it, leaving three living and seven dead colleagues behind.

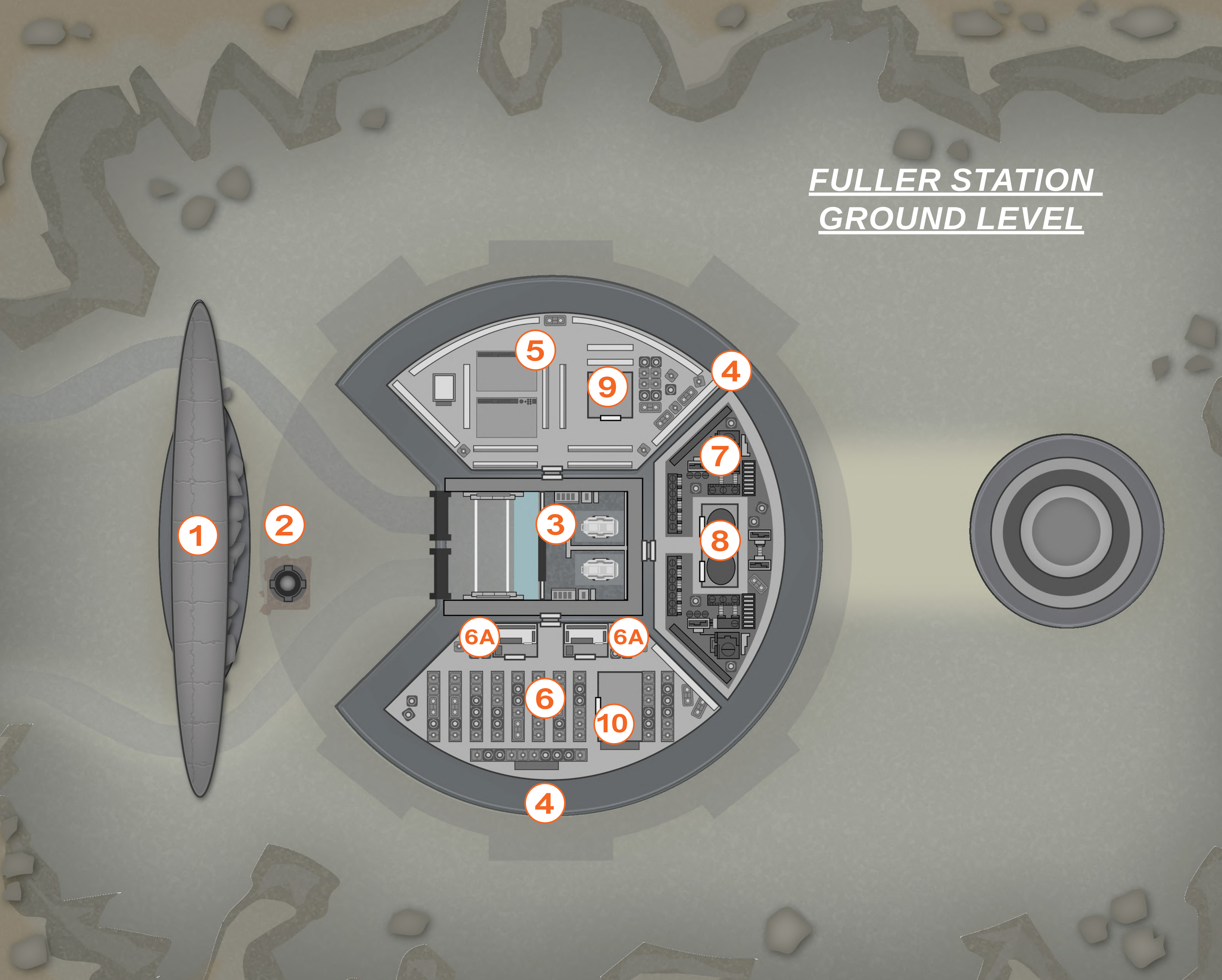
Most of the command and senior staff are alive but only the engineering manager (Finisterre) is still in the station. The installation manager and chief space scientist are dead, as are one of the space science researchers, one of the planetary science researchers, and three support staff. This means that only Sorrel has Command level access and she will not reveal that unless she has to.

FULLER STATION GROUND LEVEL

The ground level component of the station is dedicated to working and storage spaces. The cut-out in the circular shape of the tower is floored with an expanse of Loscom which has developed a few cracks from heating and cooling cycles but is otherwise perfectly serviceable. An awning of multiple layers of slivered material extends out from above the vehicular entrance to the outer berm.

Overall, the Travellers will find the ground level unusually quiet. There are no living personnel on this level and nobody died here. The security robots have retired to their cubicles and powered down. They will not be reactivated by the arrival of the Travellers, partially because defective reprogramming has declared this level secure and partly because Sorrel is with the Travellers. The robots will reactivate if the Travellers show hostility to Sorrel or other robots, or try to do something that could compromise the installation as a whole. This includes accessing the nuclear damper chamber or commanding the system to shut down.

If sabotage of Sorrel's ATV is suspected she is furious and wants to find out who is responsible. Kaigh just wants to run yet more tests and be reassured she is not dying. If they are aware of the EAV departure they will be expecting the facility to be empty and are very worried about why. Sorrel in particular wants to check the dampers and cooling system are functional, or so she says. This is true and sensible but she also wants to get a look at the planetary science database and see if anyone has interfered in her plan.



FULLER STATION
GROUND LEVEL

1
2
5
9
4
7
3
8
6A
6A
6
10
4

OUTER BERM (1)

A tall outer berm composed of blocks of Loscom interspersed with general rubble makes a direct approach into the parking area impossible. The berm blocks direct light shining into the base and serves as an anchor point for a multi-layered awning extending down from the upper level. If the Travellers get close enough to take sensor readings, the berm materials register as unusually dense and contain a higher percentage of metals than would be expected on a conventional planet.

CUT-OUT AND ROD (2)

The 'cut-out' in the base's otherwise circular structure is covered over by the floor above, providing shade for vehicles parked there. The nearest of the mysterious rods to the installation projects up through the Loscom flooring. It has been attacked with a great variety of tools, with only a few small chips removed. The top of the rod is about 1.6 metres above the surface of the parking area, which nearby is pitted and chipped as a by-product of attempts to break pieces off the rod. Most other rods protrude further from the ground. There is no obvious reason why this one is shorter. The top is carved with swirling patterns which appear to be original – there is no sign this rod has been cut or altered, other than bits bashed off the side.

VEHICLE GARAGE (3)

The vehicle garage is protected by heavy doors which are kept shut and covered by layers of retractable flexible screens when access is not required. Each layer is retracted in turn for cooling, ensuring that none is overloaded. If the cycle were not continuous it is possible the screens would distort or even fail completely after a period in direct light. This is true of most systems at the installation; they operate at the outer edge of their capabilities and are kept from failure by a constant cycle of replacement to permit slight cooling.

Within the garage are facilities for maintenance and a specialised nuclear damper used to de-irradiate vehicles and equipment which has been taken outside the installation. There is also a neat collection of storage boxes against one wall, known as the 'fail pile' by the researchers at the installation. This contains the remains of tools used to try to break pieces off the mysterious rod in the approach area. There is one tracked heavy ATV of the type the Travellers are using parked in the bay, along with three conventional wheeled types. These cannot function for long in daytime but are capable of nightside operations. All vehicles are locked down but can be activated by anyone listed as being a staff member at the installation.

The vehicle garage is separated from the rest of the installation by thick walls of Loscom, which have a similar internal structure to the outer ones. They are pierced by heavy airlocked doors festooned with warning signs and procedure-reminders. Some of these are clearly home-made and depict oddly specific incidents or individuals who might be recognised as the Travellers make their way around the installation. A set of hostile environment and vacc suit stations are also present. Some are simply ready racks but there is a lot of suit maintenance equipment in the garage. There are more suits than personnel and more racks than suits. Additional complete suits and spares are stored elsewhere in the installation.

OUTER WALLS (4)

The outer walls of the installation are extremely thick but are not completely solid. Embedded within them are layers of specialised equipment, including a set of experimental conduit panels connected to the installation's nuclear dampers, created to ensure complete coverage of the installation. They are still in their trials phase, and sometimes cause the researchers serious worries, but overall the system seems to work. How much better than nuclear dampers alone the system might be is the subject of an ongoing study.

Within the walls are heat-transfer conduits connected to a heat-storage gel system similar to the one developed for starships. The gel is slowly forced through a series of tubes, collecting heat from the outer walls, then into storage tanks connected to the radiator panels outside the installation. In daytime this removes a little energy from the installation as the panels are cooler than the gel once it reaches the storage pits. In night-time the amount of energy that can be disposed of is enormous. Heat venting takes place as soon as the outside temperature begins to drop.

LABORATORIES (5)

The installation's laboratory complex is contained within an internal bulkhead system of similar composition to the outer walls. In addition to laboratories dedicated to physical science and the study of the world outside, there are small conference/argument chambers with advanced holographic lecture aids. Despite this, at least some of the researchers seem to favour physically writing equations and other information on paper or even nearby surfaces.

There are numerous projects ongoing in the laboratory complex, with rock samples lying around in storage boxes and tools left out alongside half-eaten meals – typical of a research installation. The overall impression is business-as-usual but a lot of it, with personnel reluctantly leaving their own work to help someone else.

Activating any computer terminal grants immediate basic-level access. This allows the Travellers to read a great many absolutely fascinating analyses of rock samples and temperature gradients. The overall impression for anyone skimming through the files shows local rock composition is unusually high in heavy materials, temperature and radiation levels are a bit lower than would be expected and the general consensus is that this is connected with the mysterious rods. Nobody can figure out how this works, however.

There is no generally available data on the composition of the rods and gaining access to the full research requires getting into the computer system somehow. Travellers who spend some time wading through the endless files on sample extraction and core-boring expeditions may finally note the occasional entry referring to ‘jewels’ or ‘gems’. Most of these turn out to be references to more or less conventional precious stones, often of unusual composition, found in samples taken. Others are more cryptic, referencing cut jewels found close to the nearest rod head.

STORES AND SUPPLIES (6)

The area opposite the laboratory complex is given over to stores and supplies. There are huge racks of industrial-grade freezers and bins full of freeze-dried starship-type rations around the outer walls, with areas closer to the vehicle bay full of vehicle and environment suit spares. The inner wall is lined with general spares containers, ranging from superheavy-duty cooling equipment and reactor parts to delicate electronic components and vacc suit systems.

Small offices (6a) house a physical signing-out book used for specialist equipment and a computer terminal. As with most others this can be used for almost any general function but as a rule the installation staff tend to use a computer close to whatever they are doing. This one is quite battered, as it tends to be used by people busy collecting spares and equipment but is otherwise much the same as any other in the installation.

WORKSHOPS AND UTILITY SPACES (7)

The rear of the ground level is subdivided into working areas for the most part, with configurable internal walls to improve flexibility. Most of the machinery is movable but there are two heavy systems on permanent mountings. One is a miniature ore crushing and processing unit, the other a fusion-powered furnace used to melt metallic samples. Here and there are small stacks of metallic ingots, with labels stuck on them to indicate their location of origin and processing methods used. The composition of these ingots is generally unusual but of natural origin – there are no samples of rod-metal among them.

A few pieces of rod-metal can be found, unceremoniously dumped in storage boxes close to the machinery. Samples have been squashed, hammered, cut, irradiated and subjected to all manner of tests – generally without much effect. The outcome of these tests is recorded in the main system but requires staff-level access. There is also a storage container which stands out, as it is the only properly secured item in the entire facility. It is a heavy-duty sample container, tough but breachable with decent tools. Biometric locks limit access to command staff. Sorrel has that and knows what is inside. There is a rather optimistic amount of lining and padding material, with three small plastic tubes lying on it. They contain jewels identical to the ones Sorrel sent to the Travellers.

TOWER CORE (8)

Access to the upper levels and the tower is by way of the tower core. This is thickly walled to allow coolant gel conduits to run down and into the sub-levels, and contains only lifts and access shafts. Lifts run between the ground and upper floor without any security but will not go above and into the tower without assigned specific clearance. Any Command level member of staff can grant this, after which a person’s biometrics will allow access. However, a lift will not go up to the tower with anyone in it who is not cleared. Hatches between the levels can also only be opened by those with the right clearance but it is possible for non-authorised people to then use the open hatch.

Similarly, the tower base grants access to sub-level 1, directly below. It comes out next to the command suite but is not normally secured. Command level personnel can cut off access either to all non-command personnel or to non-registered personnel, but this has not been deemed necessary during the operation of the base.

LOWER LEVEL ACCESS (9)

A shaft grants access to part of sub-level 1. As this is the main fusion reactor chamber, access is restricted to registered installation staff.

LOWER LEVEL ACCESS (10)

Another similar shaft grants access to part of sub-level 1, in this case the secondary reactor chamber. Access is restricted to registered installation staff.

SUB-LEVEL 1

Sub-level 1 is directly below the main structure. Instead of being subdivided by thick walls radiating out from the centre, as with the levels above ground, Sub-level 1 is constructed with a more open pattern. There are eight chambers, each with substantial Loscom walls but the areas in between them are largely open. There is a lot of unused space on this level.

The usual point of entry into the level is by way of the tower core, although it is possible to come down into either of the reactor chambers and use the access doors there. It will be obvious to anyone who does this that these are rarely used, other than as a shortcut for those accessing sub-level 2 from the laboratory complex.

There are at least two security robots on this level and more if the Referee desires. They are active and patrolling. One tends to stay close to the command chamber and computer room, whist the other prowls about near the access point to sub-level 2.

MAIN REACTOR CHAMBER (11)

The installation's main reactor is a typical small starship-type system, apparently custom-built for installation here. The unit is a maze of piping conduits and sub-systems, with only the main fusion chamber fully enclosed. This makes maintenance access simple but moving the reactor elsewhere – for example, after decommissioning the installation – would be more difficult. The chamber is shared with life-support equipment and the main heat-management pumping system, an impressive piece of machinery which makes a great deal of noise.

The main reactor chamber is regularly visited for calibration and maintenance, and is used as a thoroughfare by staff headed for the lower sub-level from the laboratory complex. It is not uncommon for the doors through to the rest of the level to be locked open, despite regulations that say critical machinery must be kept secure.

When the robots began attacking, the installation's engineering manager, Finisterre Summer, took shelter in this chamber. He is very familiar with it, since it is his primary responsibility, and was in such a rush to get here that he missed the call to make for the EAV. He has tried to venture out but there is a security robot between him and the lower-level access. He might try to explore the lower level but is likely to retreat into his hiding-place at the merest hint of movement. He does not realise it is now safe to operate on that level.

SECONDARY REACTOR CHAMBER (12)

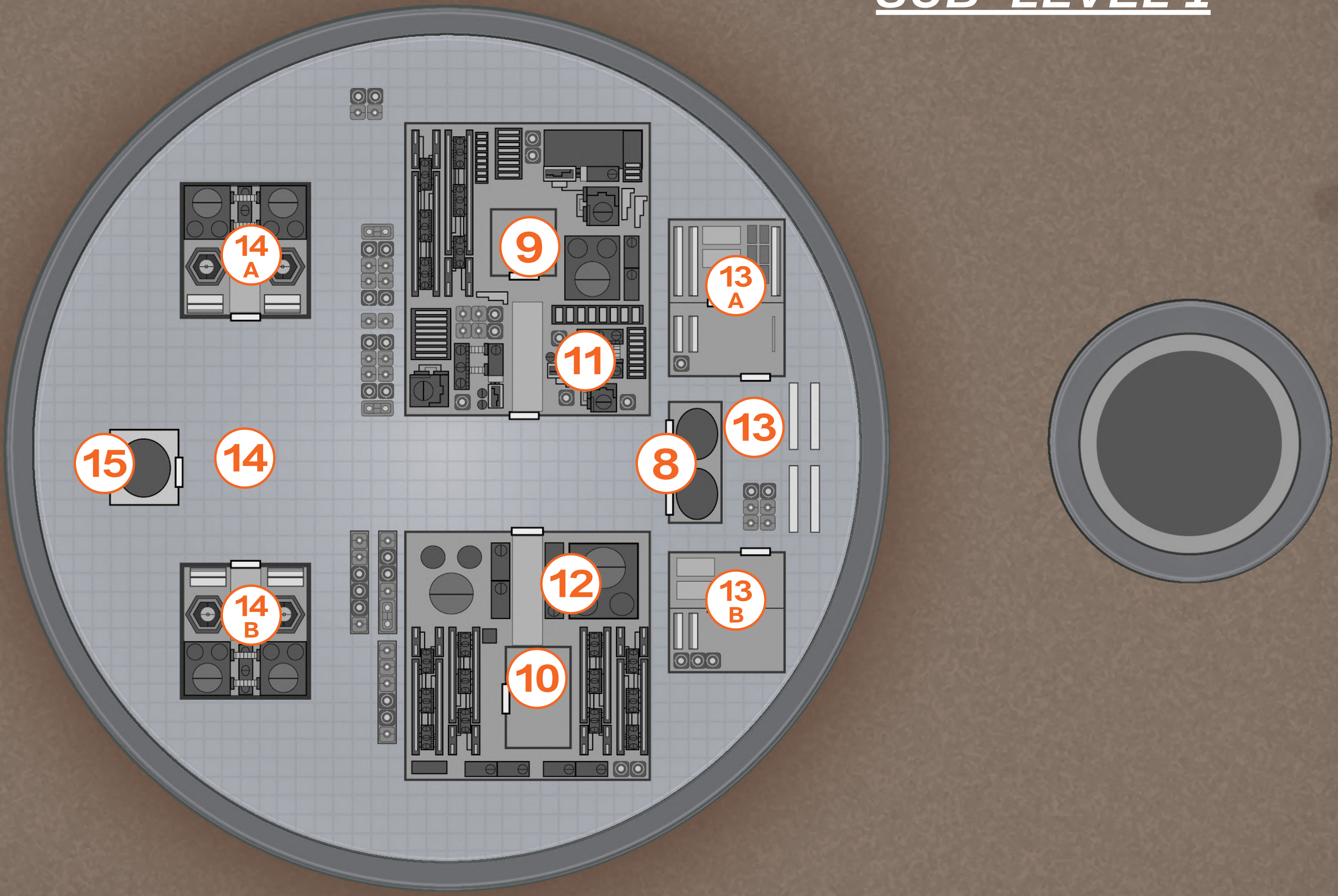
The secondary reactor chamber is similar to the main one, except that the reactor itself is a mobile self-contained unit which takes up much of the chamber. Cooling and life-support systems are built around the central power unit and make no less noise than in the main chamber. It is clear that other than maintenance this chamber is rarely used.

COMMAND SUITE (13)

This end of the sub-level is given over to the rather grandly termed command suite. A grouping of rooms (13a) contains the actual control room, a couple of offices and an ancillary chamber which serves as the armoury. Nominal weaponry for the installation is four snub revolvers with a mix of less-lethal and lethal ammunition, plus two laser carbines. There is a container, never opened, which holds four stun batons. The weaponry is locked in a cabinet which is usually blocked by boxes, odd pieces of equipment and whatever else has been dumped against that wall. It is apparent that security has never been an issue here. Access to the command suite is set to All Staff.

In a cluttered drawer in the installation manager's desk is a clip capable of holding three wristbands. Two are still present. These grant Command level access to the wearer and are used as a convenient bypass for security. They are rather clunky things, knocked together in the installation's workshop to make it unnecessary to keep adding and taking away access privileges. The wristbands were intended only to allow personnel to move unhindered by secure doors but they cause the wearer to be recognised by all systems as having Command access. This can be used to spoof the main computer system, effectively allowing the wearer to grant permanent access to anyone they please. Travellers with a background in security of any sort may throw up their hands in despair at learning this – workarounds of this sort are the bane of any effective security system – but they may come in useful.

FULLER STATION
SUB -LEVEL 1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On the far side of the tower core is a second group of chambers (13b) housing the main computer room and a couple of working chambers. One has been set up with a mini-galley for those doing a lot of data analysis and appears to be well used. The work could be done from anywhere of course but some researchers find it useful to have a specific place for this kind of task, and to be able to get together with others on a joint project – or just to share the tedium of data work. The main computer chamber requires Specific or Command level access but its door is no more solid than any other internal access point.

The installation manager, Theador Bawinne, lies where he fell. He was trying to reach his office to disable the security system. The robot that killed him waits nearby to defend the command suite against anyone other than Sorrel. It will try to use less-lethal options or warnings if possible unless there is an immediate threat but its programming is sufficiently wayward that it might over or under-react to any situation.

UTILITY AREA (14)

The other side of sub-level 1 was envisaged as a utility or overflow working area but has never been required. It is oddly tidy and empty. Within this area are two smallish but thick-walled chambers (14a and 14b) which require Command level access. These contain the installation's nuclear dampers. They can be controlled from elsewhere but maintenance – or the opposite – requires entry into the chambers. The security on these accessways is partially due to concerns about radiation but mostly because even an installation as relaxed about security as this one cares about the dampers remaining secure. A mistake by an unqualified person could impair their function and kill everyone within hours. Most personnel are so used to these areas being off-limits they just forget about them.

The second robot on this level has defaulted to its programming and waits near the damper rooms. There are laser burns on the outer walls where it fired on personnel trying to reach the lower-level access. Only one was disabled, although others might have been non-fatally hit. This is Eunice Shewol, one of the support staff. The robot may or may not interfere with personnel trying to reach the lower level. It will certainly fire on anyone trying to approach the damper chambers.

SUB LEVEL 2 ACCESS (15)

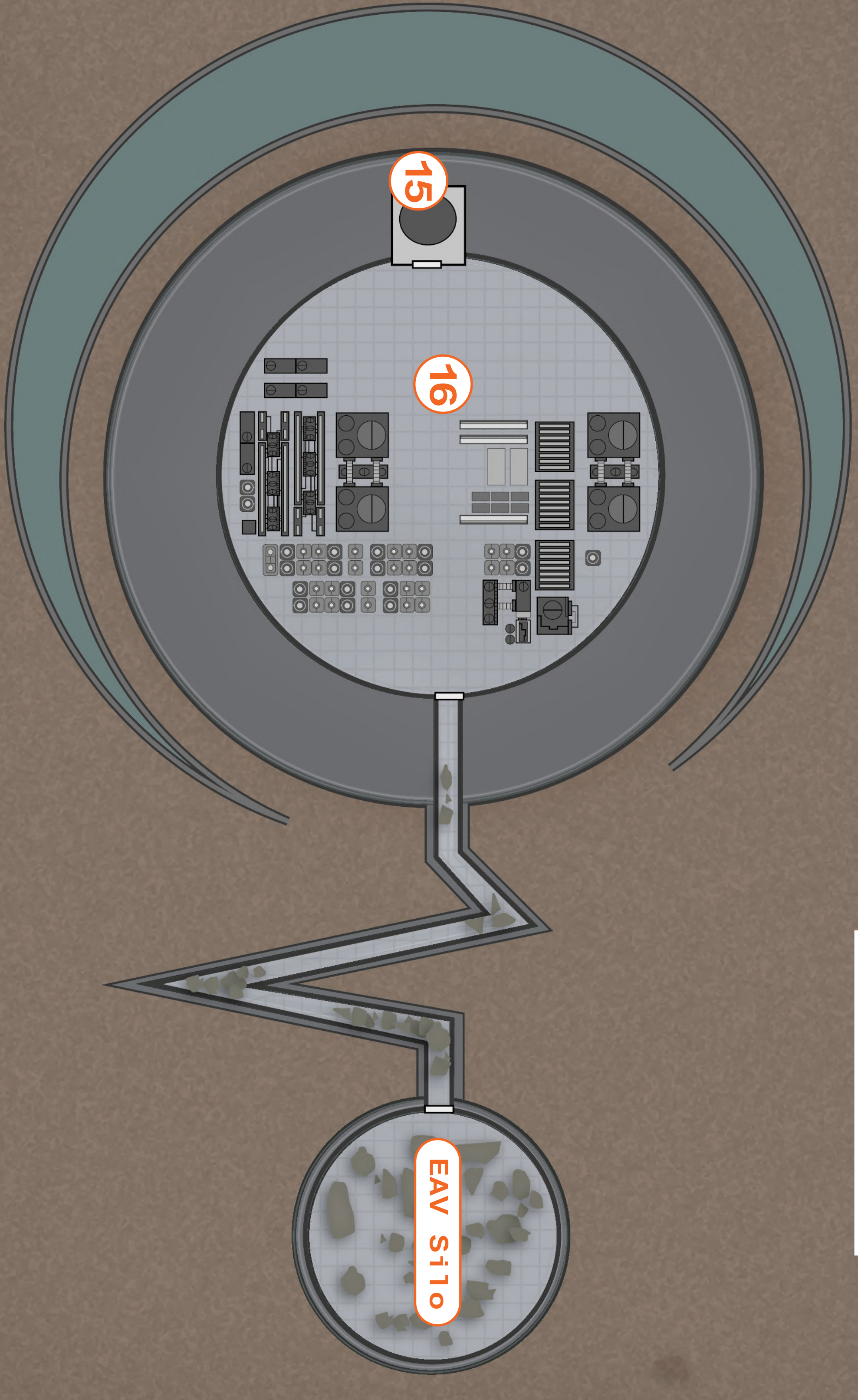
Access to the lowest level of the installation is by way of a hollow structural pillar containing a lift shaft and access tube. It is normally at a Staff level of access, since various personnel need to use the sub-level as part of their work.

SUB-LEVEL 2

Sub-level 2, like other parts of the installation, is under-utilised. It might eventually be filled with equipment but at present has only a few banks of instrumentation. These are dedicated to the planetary science part of the installation's mission and scattered around the periphery of the single large chamber (16). The only significant features are the access pillar from sub-level 1 and a set of airlocked doors leading to a zig-zagging tunnel. Another set of doors at the far end, hardened against blast and the environment outside, leads into the EAV silo. The tunnel is now impassable; charges brought the roof down and blocked it with tons of rock when the EAV launched, to protect the installation now that the EAV silo no longer has a roof. Around the sub-level is a reservoir filled with heat management gel. From here it can be pumped around the walls of the installation or to radiator panels to manage heating during a local day.

A network of sensors is embedded in the rock around the installation, in some cases buried deep. Contact with these systems using standard radio is patchy to impossible, so an ingenious system of underground transmission and connection nodes were established during the first few night-cycles of the installation. Data is transmitted by way of vibration pulses through the rock, or where possible by a hard landline bored through to the collection point. Control of instruments is slow going, so most of the time they are set to make a data dump at the end of a set period, in turn. The instrumentation chamber receives a constant flow of updates but it can be many hours between a given sensor reporting and its next contact – and it is common for data to be garbled. The end result is a slow trickle of information from any one source but with dozens of sources there is always something to work with.

FULLER STATION SUB-LEVEL 2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EAV Silo

Raw data is set up for Staff access elsewhere in the installation and is unsecured in this chamber. Analysis work is mostly Staff access protected, with a few projects secured specifically to individuals. Among these is the blandly named ‘Confirmation Case 12’. If the Travellers gain access to this they will find an immense amount of mathematics and data analysis, grouped in some arcane manner that presumably makes sense to whoever wrote it. There are no clear statements or executive summary – this is an individual’s personal project rather than a paper to be presented. Someone with a background in planetary science could make sense of it eventually, or the installation’s computer system might be able to create a summary.

If this is attempted, it becomes apparent that the author is applying stress calculations to incomplete models of the planet’s internal structure; they are trying to work out if Calefaction will disintegrate at perihelion. The answer to this appears to be: *Case 12 Not Proven*. Travellers might decide that means the planet will remain intact but this is not quite true. All it means is that the available data does not conclusively prove Calefaction will disintegrate at perihelion. Refinement of the data will provide a more concrete answer to the questions that most trouble the Travellers:

- Is Calefaction going to come apart in the near future?
- If so, when?

Case 12 has not – yet – been proven and there is a consideration the researcher has completely omitted. What if someone wanted it to? Could they influence the situation? No rational person would even consider that question… but the Travellers might. They would be wise to do so.

Sorrel wants access to this chamber, as it is the only place from which she can control and monitor the rods. Almost all other functions are decentralised but Sorrel has compartmentalised this one to avoid detection. Her place of work is the most awkward console to use; the one everyone overlooks because what they want to do can be done from a more ergonomic location. She will tell the Travellers she wants to monitor the station’s systems and outside conditions. They may realise it is rather odd to do that in such a cramped location.

UPPER LEVEL AND TOWER

The upper main level is primarily a living area for the staff. Access is provided by the tower core (8) which will normally allow any personnel to move freely between the three main floors (lower and upper levels and sub-level 1). Access to the tower is restricted to a few specific personnel. This floor had two security robots. As always the Referee can add more if the Travellers are well-armed.

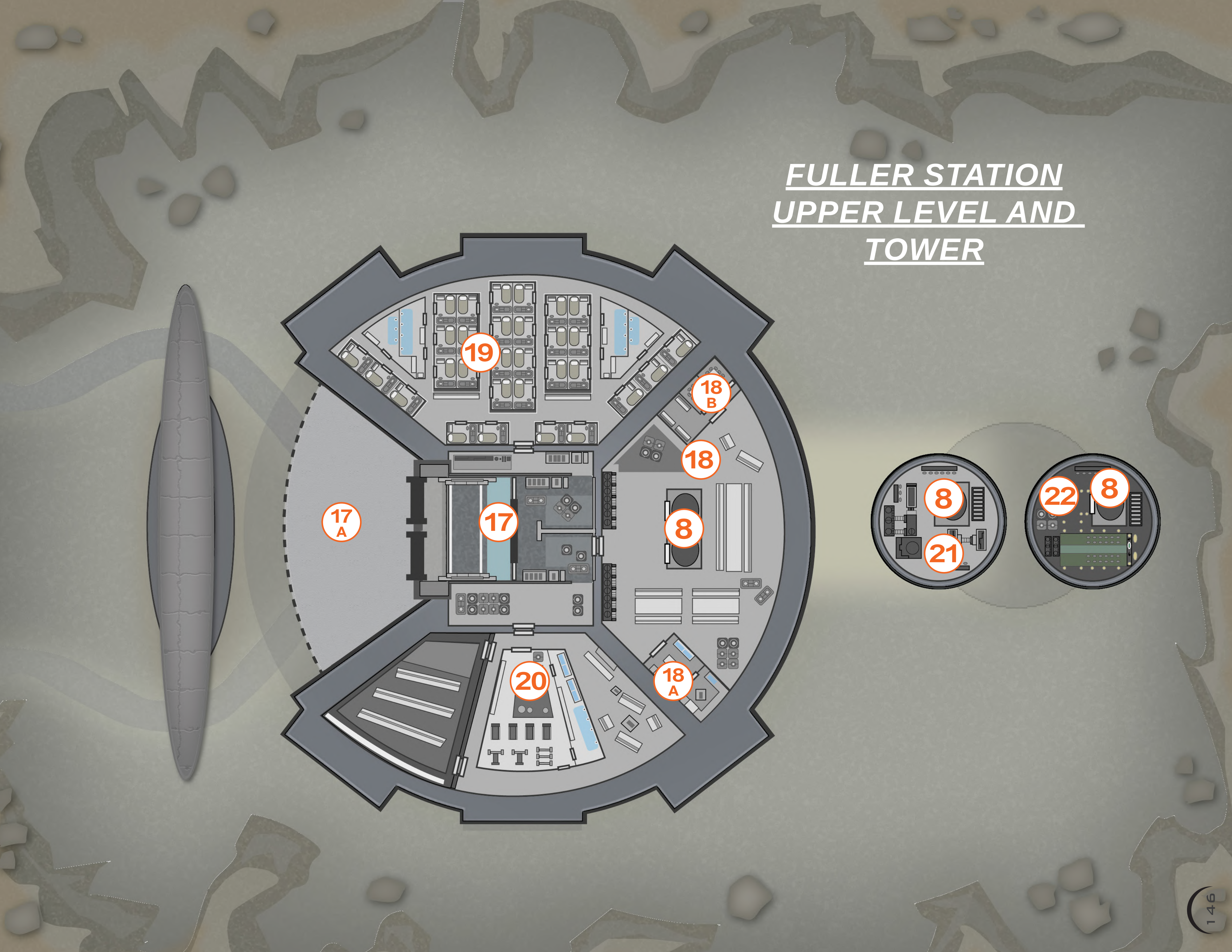
This level is not immediately of interest to Sorrel; she has business in sub-level 2. Kaigh will want to come here to use the medical facilities. It is on this level that the Travellers will begin to figure out what happened here. The ‘trigger incident’ took place in the dining/utility space, with four crewmembers almost immediately gunned down and another killed trying to get out of the chamber only moments later.

GRAV VEHICLE GARAGE (17)

The installation was built with grav vehicles in mind but local conditions made operations impossible. A standard vehicle-sized grav lifter unit will rapidly burn out if exposed to Calefaction’s electromagnetically complex environment. For this reason, the grav vehicle garage has never been used for its intended purpose. Instead, it is mostly empty except for a still set up by some of the researchers. A variety of products from this still are stored around the walls of the chamber. These range from surgical-grade pure alcohol to various oddly flavoured concoctions made using inventive artificial flavours.

The grav garage faces onto the upper surface of the cut-out area, which was originally envisaged as a landing area. Its surface is more perpendicular to sunlight than the rest of the building, resulting in excessive heating. This problem was partially solved by spreading the same silvered material as used in the awnings over the landing surface. This has helped protect the structure but creates a focused solar furnace that could incinerate anyone who ventured out, even in a hostile environment suit. For this reason the double outer doors of the garage are locked to Command access only.

FULLER STATION UPPER LEVEL AND TOWER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Vaughan Clemens is holed up in here. When the security robots emerged from their cubicles and started shooting he was unconscious on the floor. He came to in time to see a couple of others get into the tower access shaft, presumably headed down to the lower level. Clemens was on the wrong side of the robot to make such an attempt. Instead he got through the access door and locked himself in the garage. Since then he has been trying to calm his nerves by sampling the products of the still. Now he is drunk enough, he has decided, he will make a try for the EAV or the vehicle bay. He is already too drunk to succeed but not enough to make the attempt. If the Travellers rescue him he will be incoherent and not all that much use for a while.

DINING AND UTILITY SPACE (18)

The tower core opens out into a mostly open area (18). There are two internal structures. One (18a) is the galley complex, consisting of a main and two smaller cooking areas plus storage for meals. Opposite the galleys is a second enclosed area (18b) which contains meeting rooms. Some of these have minor clutter indicating they were in regular use, whilst others have never been needed. Some of the office furniture still has its factory wrappers in place. The remainder of area 18 is mostly open, with storage lockers against the walls in places. Heavy doors give access to the dwelling and recreation areas, and to the grav vehicle garage.

It was in the main dining area that Keith Ayala confessed to his crewmates that he had sabotaged Sorrel's ATV and asked them to mount a rescue if possible. Matters never proceeded that far; they grabbed him, planning to drag him in front of the command staff right away and let them decide what to do. This triggered the security robots and within seconds Ayala was dead, along with two support staff named Giem Romero and Wade Durmin plus Iszechu Soto, the chief space scientist. Another staff member, a planetary science researcher named Donald Saha, was hit as he tried to reach the lift shaft. His body lies right across the doors.

It is likely there will be a security robot in this chamber when the Travellers arrive, making it necessary to deactivate, trick or destroy it before the bodies can be investigated. All are in normal working clothes, without tools or weapons. There is no indication anyone came here to start a fight but Ayala has broken bones in his right hand from hitting someone and there are clothing tears and similar evidence of a scuffle that did not involve the robots.

The overall impression gained from the kitchens is business-as-usual. Most of the food at Fuller is typical starship meal-packs of adequate but uninspiring quality, however there are stocks of frozen ingredients for special occasions. It will be clear to the Travellers that no special meals were planned, at least not for the majority of the staff. A few meal packs have been used and untidily disposed of, much as normal with busy people eating when they can take a break from work rather than at set times. There is no evidence in the main kitchen of any unusual activity. The open area close to the kitchens is used for dining and can easily seat the whole installation personnel complement. This rarely happened, with everyone running to their own schedules and it is clear from the wear on some tables that most of the time staff ate alone or in small groups on the nearest table rather than gathering around the main one.

AYALA'S JEWEL

The jewel found by Keith Ayala is still on his body. Like the smaller ones the Travellers have already encountered, it will affect anyone who has it for a lengthy period. This was the source of Ayala's paranoia and final descent into murderous desperation. The jewel is a radiation sink like the others but has a different function. Someone who knows how can link it to other, smaller, jewels and control them remotely. It is also possible to use a jewel as a viewpoint and see what it 'sees' through this one. On Calefaction the primary use of this jewel was to remotely control those embedded in the rods, removing the necessity to be close to them. The remote-viewing function was of little value but could be used to monitor emplaced equipment.

DWELLINGS (19)

This part of the level is given over to dwellings for the installation's staff. Personal spaces are equivalent to a starship cabin, each secured by a Specific access lock. Most of the researchers have few possessions here at Fuller; a few personal effects and a couple of changes of clothes. The installation is very much a workplace rather than a home and most of the staff wear the same utility clothing off duty and on. Each cabin has a personal computer terminal, most of which log out after a certain period of time. However, some of the researchers habitually leave their computer on and logged in. This could be used by the Travellers to gain access to the installation's computer system without bypassing security.

In one of the corridors the Travellers will find another victim. This is Jitendra Zuang, another of the support staff. She emerged from her chamber, where she had been asleep, and was immediately shot by a security robot. She appears to have been killed by a blunt instrument rather than laser fire. If the Travellers investigate they will find a discharged gas grenade. Apparently the robot tried to use less-lethal methods but an unfortunate ricochet sent the projectile into the back of Jitendra's head at close range. She will have died instantly.

RECREATION AREA (20)

A secondary living space was deemed unnecessary for the number of staff at the installation, so this space is set up for recreation. There is a gym and a games area at one end and a small cinema at the other. In between are lounges with well-stocked – and apparently well-used – drinks cabinets. Most of the booze is imported but some containers have been repurposed to hold distillates made on-site. These are not for the faint-hearted.

TOWER LOWER LEVEL (21)

Generally requiring Command level access, the lower tower level is a data-reception and analysis suite similar to the one in sub-level 2 but dedicated to instruments located above ground. The usual mode of operation is to pop-up a communications laser from its shielded housing and make a quick interrogation or give instructions to a sensor cluster. Mobile targets must be searched for, typically using cameras to avoid exposing the lasers to excessive heating. Even so, serviceability rates drop during each day cycle, requiring replacement of components as soon as conditions are cool enough. Of all the components found in the 'break for components' and 'for repair' bins in the workshop, comms lasers have the highest proportion of failures – almost all of them heat related.

There is nothing very unusual about the lower tower level. Secured access is mainly to prevent accidents, as the tower is less well-cooled than the rest of the installation. Once within the tower there is normally no impediment to moving between its levels but for reasons not immediately apparent the access shaft has been keyed to a 'special' access status separate from the usual Staff, Specific and Command levels. There is no indication of who has this level of access and no record of the change on the main computer. This suggests that access was manually restricted here in the tower using some kind of override on the hatch controls.

If the Travellers take the time they will be able to find the override, which takes the form of a circuit board wired into the control system under an access panel. The work has been well done but the component is clearly non-standard. Simply tearing it out will remove the access limitation, or it can be bypassed electronically. Failing that, the Travellers could get Sorrel to open the door for them. As a member of the Church she naturally had access to its sanctum. If questioned Sorrel will freely admit she created the security feature and will offer to show the Travellers why. This might seem a bit sinister but suspicions will be alleviated when she shows them the temple. Sorrel truthfully explains that she and her fellow believers wanted a safe place to be near their god and this was the best choice. Everything she says is natural and sincere… she just leaves out the part where she is planning to destroy the planet.

TOWER UPPER LEVEL (22)

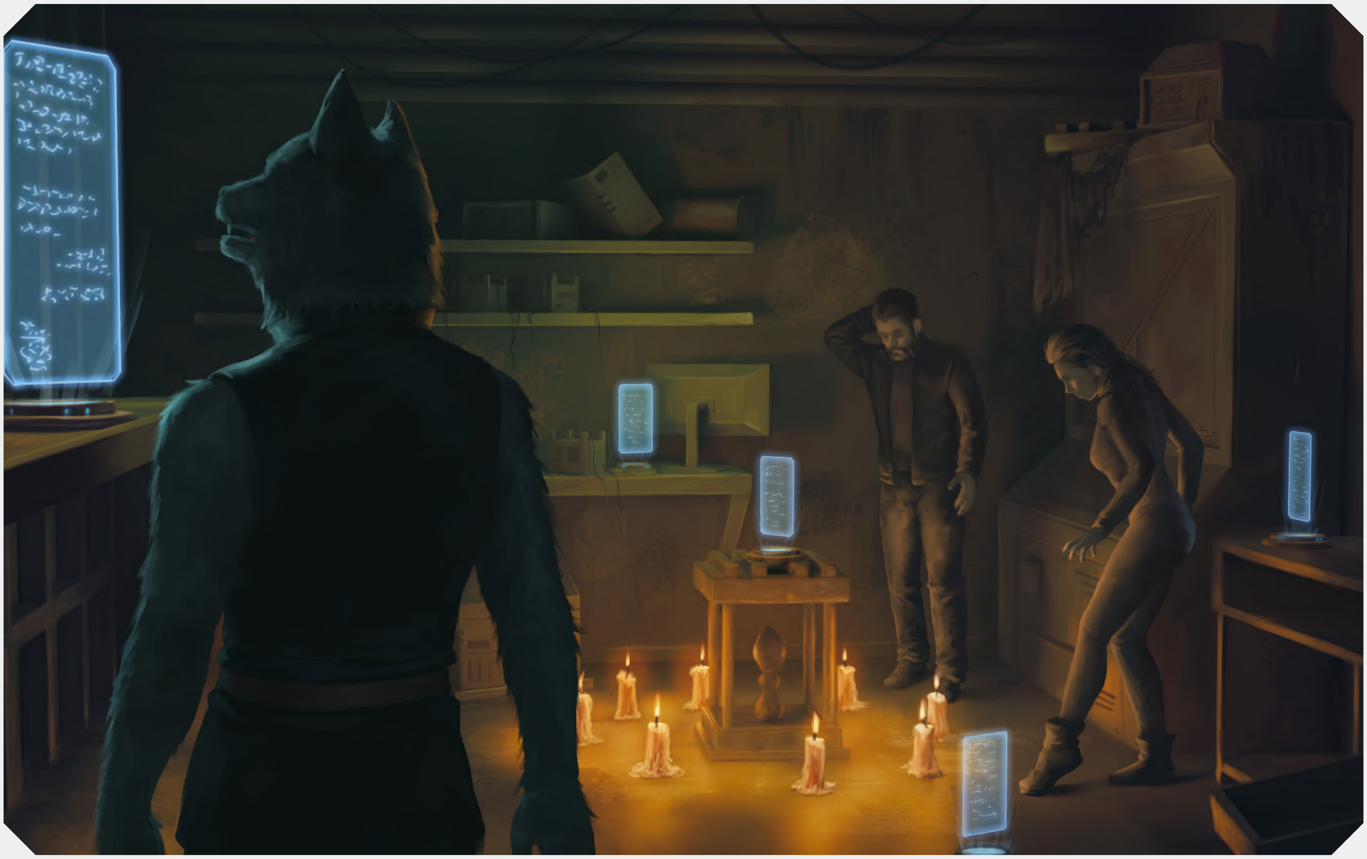
The upper level of the tower is not normally used other than to access instruments and equipment for maintenance. With no need to go in there for weeks on end, most personnel tend to forget it is even there. Oddly, no internal security camera footage is available from within the top level. All other working and common areas have full camera coverage.

The reason for this will become obvious if the Travellers manage to gain entry. The top level has been converted into some kind of shrine. There is not much to it; an altar made from simple metal tubing and a handful of holographic projectors of the sort typically used to display images on an office desk. Instead of pictures of home and family, to be replaced by interactive communications when needed, these display religious images. Passages from the holy books of a religion appear as flaming words floating in the air, accompanied by solemn music, followed by images of stars and solar flares. The Travellers may recognise or figure out that these are images connected with the Church of Stellar Divinity.

A cursory inspection suggests that this is nothing more or less than a small personal shrine but a careful study taking a couple of hours leaves the observer with a different perspective. Many of the messages are standard, typically connected with life-giving energy and rebirth, but there is a destructive undercurrent to it all. The longer a Traveller watches the more they will be convinced that this is a shrine to the apocalyptic aspects of the Church of Stellar Divinity. Stars are deities but not always kindly ones. There is something faintly disturbing about this shrine and no indication of who made it.

Kellys Parroe is hiding here. When the robots attacked she went up as the others descended, seeking sanctuary in her temple. Since then she has been praying for salvation, even to the point of aiming comms lasers at the star and sending messages to her god. Those lasers are now out of commission and no answer was forthcoming… until the Travellers arrived. There is nothing untoward about Kellys being in the tower – all members of the religion had access. She is not certain but thinks Sorrel set up a security lockout when she built the shrine. Kellys knows how to disable the system without removing it.

The tower and Kellys can be used by the Referee to shift suspicion or allay it. The Travellers will realise Sorrel has ‘got religion’ but will find nothing sinister about the setup. The Church of Stellar Divinity is well respected and quite popular. Sorrel never seemed the type but with that giant fiery orb so close… The normalness of Sorrel and Kellys might worry the Travellers but perhaps for the wrong reasons. They might be of the opinion that religion is somehow ‘not normal’ in a starfaring society but that is not the case. There are many religions and belonging to one is not out of the ordinary. Still, membership of the cult might make Sorrel or Kellys seem suspicious. If so, the Referee can use Kellys to distract the Travellers from Sorrel.



INTERLUDE IN HELL

The Travellers may want to explore the installation and try to find out what happened here. Kaigh will certainly urge them to look for survivors and Sorrel will say the same thing with a different agenda. She assumes that someone tried to interfere in her endeavour and the robots prevented them. Sorrel cannot tell the Travellers this, so will go along with a search for survivors and answers, attempting to get access to the systems she needs along the way. She says she is not capable of shutting down the security robots now they have been activated and does not want to admit to fiddling with their programming anyway.

In fact Sorrel can shut down the robots, since she has Command level access. Alternatively, she could revert the robots to their original programming. They will then protect the installation as they were programmed to do – which means capturing or killing anyone not on the staff list – rather than preventing interference in Sorrel's programme. She does not really want to do that. It will make the robots more predictable but they will still consider anyone who has caused damage to them or the installation as hostile. In any case Sorrel wants the robots protecting her endeavour and will interfere with them only if she has to. Since they will not fire on her under any circumstances she may be able to use this to her advantage if the Travellers try to stop her.

The Travellers are likely to want access to the installation's computers, which Sorrel can grant. She is entirely willing to do this and it may be that the Travellers' trust for her is increased. She hopes to recruit them and that her friends will join her glorious ascent to be one with her god. To this end Sorrel will facilitate access to the computers and security camera footage. There is rather a lot of that but with some effort the Travellers should be able to access the part where Keith Ayala sabotaged Sorrel's ATV. They can check out the compound he made to blow the tracks – the residue of his work is hidden in plain sight in the labs. To most people it looks like just another materials experiment.

The Travellers will also be able to witness the altercation in the dining area and the intervention by the robots. They may be able to locate the robots using the live camera feed, or search for survivors. However, they will not be able to shut down the robots. An alert is in progress and can only be cancelled by someone with Command level access. If the Travellers ask who that is, the system dutifully provides a list. It includes the expected senior personnel but also Sorrel. This might leave her with some explaining to do.

QUAKES AND REVELATIONS

Whilst the Travellers are in the Fuller installation, a seismic quake shakes the area. It is not very powerful, and poses no threat to the structures, but it goes on for several minutes before dying down. If the Travellers observe Sorrel during the quake they may realise she is not as scared as everyone else. Even a minor structural failure would kill everyone in the installation, so there is plenty of reason to be nervous. Yet whilst Sorrel is slightly concerned, she also seems oddly pleased.

Sorrel will find a moment to get access to the research computers, ideally at her special-access point in the lowest sub-level. She will happily pass on all the information she has to the Travellers, although she will omit for now the part where she is trying to destroy the planet. Sorrel informs the Travellers that quakes are intermittent but not uncommon, and that they may be connected with expansion or contraction of the alien rods around the installation. This latest quake is not the largest recorded here; in fact it was about 78% of the greatest strength recorded. The installation is not in danger from quakes unless they hit at least 300% of the greatest recorded strength.

Sorrel wants to work on and monitor her endeavour. She will assist the Travellers when they ask but tries to return to her work as soon as possible. She offers plausible reasons that she needs to make backups of all data and monitor the seismic conditions in case a quick exit is required. The second part of this is true but anyone watching Sorrel may realise she is not making any real effort to preserve the installation's data if it must be abandoned.

The Travellers will have plenty to do during this time. They will have to deal with the security robots, wade through hours of internal camera footage and external sensor data. There are three survivors to find and question, and it might not be a bad idea to take a look at the ATV ready for departure. This can play out in all manner of ways, perhaps causing the Travellers to realise Sorrel is up to something. Even if they do not, she will eventually reveal herself. This comes after a second quake, reaching 103% of greatest previous magnitude. Shortly afterward, Sorrel can be heard joyfully shouting that 'CASE 12 IS CONFIRMED!'. The quake subsides to a low, weak tremor no more than 15% of previous maximum magnitude – but it does not stop.

CASE 12 CONFIRMED

Sorrel is a religious fanatic but the Travellers were her friends. She is thus torn between warning them and ensuring they are part of the star-god's sacrifice. In the end, she decides to let them make a choice. No doubt the Travellers will want to know what Case 12 is and Sorrel will cheerfully and excitedly explain. The Referee should play her as the Sorrel the Travellers always knew; slightly flippant and quite rational. However, the words she is saying are anything but rational.

It all starts out sounding quite sensible. Case 12 was a hypothetical scenario; could the rods be used to cause damage deep inside the planet? If so, would that affect the possibility of Calefaction not surviving the stresses of perihelion? This translates to the more practical question – can the rods be used to ensure the planet breaks up? The answer is yes, Sorrel says. They definitely can.

The Travellers might not yet realise the implications of what Sorrel is saying. She is presenting a theoretical question, is she not? She goes on, adding in a matter-of-fact way that it was just a matter of finding the right frequency, amplitude and energy level of pulses. Some pretty complex calculations were necessary, since the variables were second, third and even fourth-order – changes of rate of change were as important as the main variables themselves. But she did it, Sorrel says.

Sorrel explains that the rods will now continue to expand indefinitely. Not quickly but they cannot be stopped in time to prevent catastrophic breakup of the planet at or close to perihelion. The sacrifice has been made and Sorrel wants everyone to willingly take part. If the Travellers choose to flee, she will not stop them – but she is sure her god will. She finally admits her plan – to deliver everyone on Calefaction as a sacrifice to rejuvenate her star-god.

It may be that the Travellers are having to stop others from tearing Sorrel apart at this point, or they may be doing the tearing. Sorrel wants to be alive when the sacrifice is made, so whilst she is reluctant to harm her friends she will use her weapon or the security robots without hesitation. After all, anyone who dies will be one with her god and will live as long as the rejuvenated star still burns.

What the Travellers do at this point is entirely up to them. They cannot stop the rods from expanding and a look at the data indicates the planet is highly likely to break up at perihelion. There is no direct comms link to the other settlements; no way to warn anyone or to ask for help. The Travellers might put Sorrel on trial, shoot her out of hand or have to fight her but whatever they do will not stop the breakup. The Emergency Ascent Vehicle is gone but the ATV is serviceable. There may or may not be time to reach Shelter Canyon.

DROYNE EX MACHINA

It is not possible to predict exactly when the planet will break up, but it will be within a few hours to a day, and the quakes will gradually intensify during that time. If the Travellers are absolutely determined to extricate themselves the Referee can play out the journey in reverse, with added complications such as new cracks or tumbled rocks. The quakes will not make driving any easier, on top of all that. There is, however, another way.

The Travellers feel or hear a soft pop of displaced air and suddenly there is a Droyne standing in front of them. He has no weapons, no vacc suit and was most definitely was not there a second ago. This is Diusk, emissary for the great Leader Yusote. His manner of arrival is not relevant to the situation so he will not comment on it but Diusk has the power of psionic teleportation. In surprisingly good Galanglic he politely invites the Travellers and anyone else who wishes to enjoy a brief stay aboard Yusote's interstellar vessel.

Diusk cannot teleport anyone aboard with him. Instead he tells the Travellers to board the ATV and drive to a sheltered spot a short distance away. Yusote's ship will pick them up. They must not leave the ATV until the ship is overhead and it cannot stay long so they must be quick. Diusk promises 'all relevant hospitality', whatever that means.

Sorrel will try to prevent the escape if she can. She does not want to hurt her friends but wishes to prevent other inhabitants of Calefaction from receiving a warning, so will attack suddenly if she can, trying to kill Diusk. She will not allow herself to be taken off Calefaction, not alive anyway, which might force some tough choices.

If the Travellers take Diusk up on his offer, he is true to his word. Once the ATV reaches a sheltered spot, Yusote's ship will dart in from the dark side of the planet, hovering millimetres above the ground for just long enough that the Travellers can scramble aboard with the assistance of burly Droyne Warriors and Workers. The ATV's nuclear dampers and any jewels the Travellers have found will protect them from radiation. Diusk informs the Travellers that the Shelter Canyon and other installations have been warned. If they want to be taken to Shelter Canyon, perhaps to pick up their ship, Yusote will convey them. He does, however, require their presence in his command chamber. He and the Travellers have something to discuss.

EXODUS

Whilst the Travellers are meeting with Yusote, he will use his control chamber's holographic projectors to show them the exodus from Calefaction. The detail is incredible, considering conventional sensors cannot penetrate the planet's radiation field. Nearby ATVs rush towards Shelter Canyon, whilst personnel board shuttles in an orderly if nervous manner. EAVs are held ready for those who cannot reach the shuttles in time. More distant crews are picked up by craft coming over from the cold face, daring the intense stellar radiation.

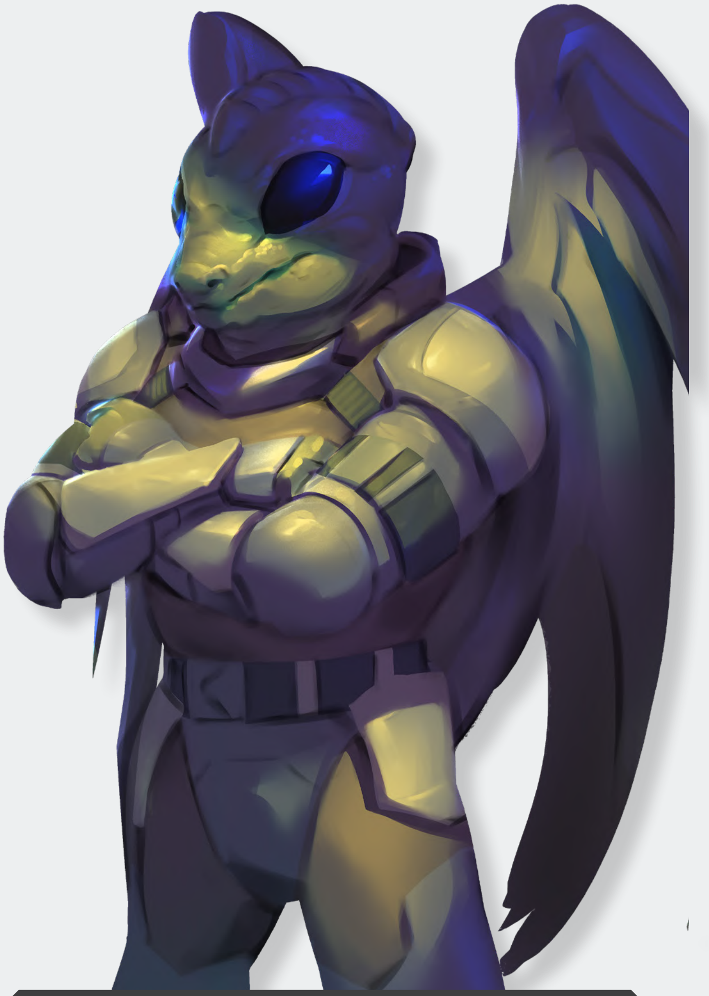
If the Travellers watch long enough they can witness the end of Calefaction. Cracks appear in the surface, many of them radiating out from the area around Fuller. The breakup will take days, enabling most or even all of the personnel to escape or be rescued. If the Travellers can get to their own ship and are so inclined they might return to the surface to rescue a stranded ATV crew, or intercept the last EAV and take the survivors off. Whatever they do, the planet will mostly be swallowed by the sun, with a few large fragments ejected across the system. It might be possible to intercept some of these and mine them; they are high in heavy metals and minerals. That, however, is a matter for another day.

YUSOTE AND HIS FOLLOWERS

Yusote is a Droyne Leader, selected for the task of seeking out artefacts of the Ancients and securing them for his Oytrip, or community. Droyne have a strange relationship with Ancients technology; a mix of terror and veneration. Some communities are completely terrified of anything connected with the Ancients and will try to destroy it. Others seek to learn about the devices or to keep them out of the hands of other groups. It is known that different Oytrips will compete for artefacts if they learn about them and may direct violence to one another over possession. Negotiation and cooperation are also possible, although it is generally not possible for humans and other non-Droyne to predict what will happen.

In the case of Yusote, the agenda is clear; he is to find any and all traces of the Ancients and secure them for his Oytrip. This is to be done in secrecy to avoid leading others to sites that cannot be completely cleared in one pass. Outsiders are used to Droyne and their ships behaving oddly, so providing Yusote is patient and careful his erratic-seeming movements across the sector should not provoke interest.

Getting into Yusote's persona might be a challenge for the Referee. He possesses almost infinite patience and will endure great hardship without complaint. Indeed, as far as he is concerned he is an instrument of his Oytrip rather than an important individual. His Oytrip requires him to make sacrifices or endure long delays, so he does. This is not to say that Yusote is without personal ambition or that he considers himself expendable; he is assured of his right to lead to a degree that goes beyond arrogance and fully expects that he will emerge as the best candidate for leadership of his Oytrip in due course. His is a curious mix of selflessness and selfishness – he intends to be the leader of his Oytrip because he is the best leader it could have. If he does not become the best candidate the Oytrip will rightly choose someone else. He is ambitious but his ambition is to be worthy of the Oytrip rather than to gain control of it. The two usually go together in Droyne society.



YUSOTE

SPECIES	GENDER	AGE
Droyne	Male	—

TRAITS			—	SKILLS
STR	7	INT	8	Athletics (dexterity) 1, Deception 1, Electronics (computers) 2, Electronics (remote ops) 2, Gun Combat 0, Investigate 1, Mechanic 1, Vacc Suit 2
DEX	9	EDU	9	
END	8	PSI	12	

WEAPONS:	Claws (1D+2), Leader-Rod (3D+3)
ARMOUR:	Leading-Armour (+15)

Yusote's followers are absolutely loyal to their Oytrip and therefore to the Leader it has appointed over them. They obey without question or dissent, and whilst they prefer to avoid coming to harm will do whatever they are ordered. The Travellers will not be able to discern much in the way of personality for the followers; they act according to their nature as Warriors, Technicians and so forth, and do what Yusote wishes. If and when the Travellers realise the Ancients were Droyne they may be alarmed at just how dangerous such a society could be. Without dissent a leader can do as they please and the idea of relentless, ruthlessly obedient warriors armed with superweapons is horrifying.

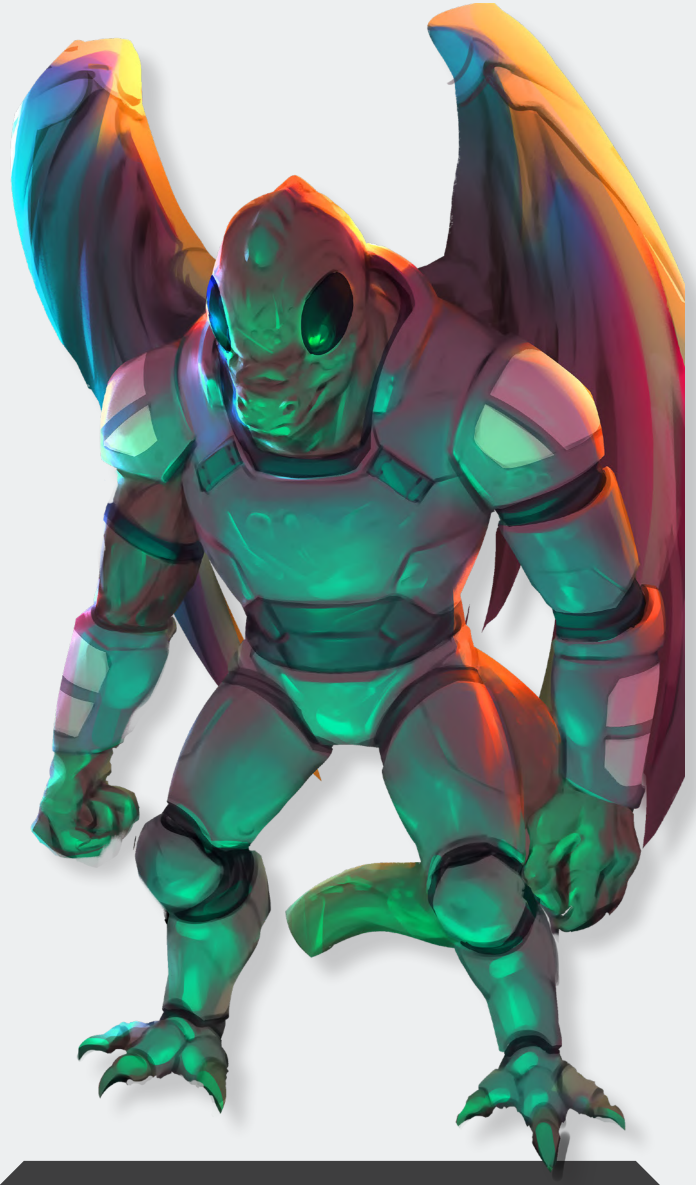
Yusote's ship has space for 36 Droyne but runs with a smaller crew. The remainder of his band are necessary for other tasks. Some are connected with daily life away from the Oytrip, others fulfil specific functions on the mission. The exact composition of the group can vary but will be something along the lines of the following:

Mission Leader: Yusote (Leader)
Yusote's Deputy: Otshayyuk (Leader)
Ceremonial Official: Ssartsse (Drone)
Mission Ambassador: Diusk (Sport)
Ship Crew: 8–12 Technicians
Ship Warriors: 4–6 Warriors
Groundside Warriors: 4–6 Warriors
Support Personnel: 2–3 Drones
Workers: 4–6 Workers

Yusote is a Droyne Leader, in complete control of everything around him. He has a clear mission and is single-minded about completing it, but is taking a roundabout route to confuse observers. He does absolutely nothing himself except in the utmost emergency; it is the nature of Droyne society that Leaders tell others what to do and they do it. Everything he and his crew do is on Yusote's terms, even if others do not realise that.

OTSHAYYUK (LEADER)

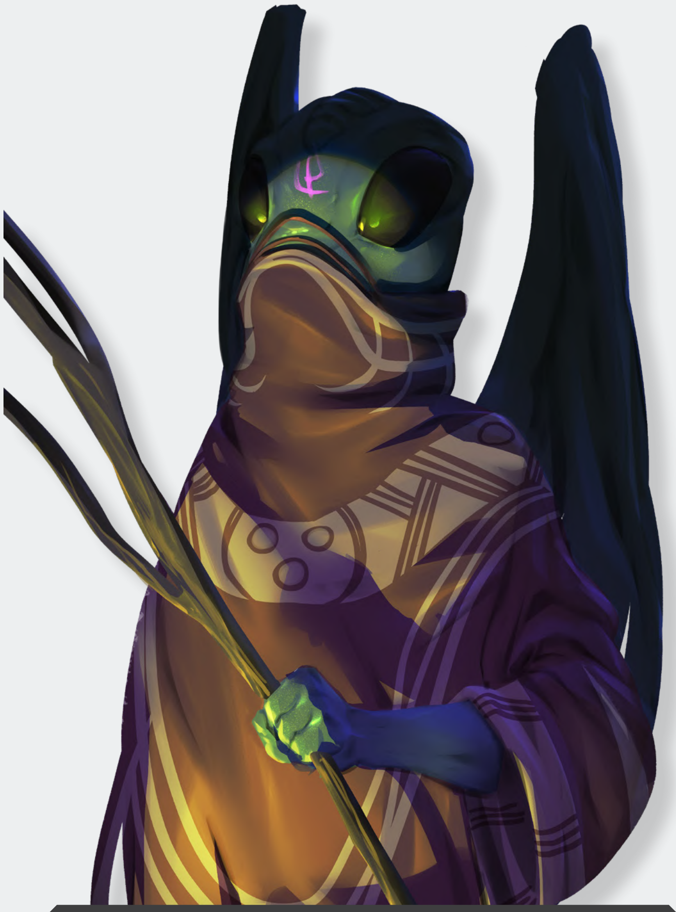
Otshayyuk is Yusote's second in command and will be delegated to conduct much of his business whilst Yusote remains aloof and mysterious in the background. Otshayyyuk has a reasonable understanding of human and Imperial culture but will not always show that he comprehends what is being said. His usual function is finding ways to circumvent or politely ignore local laws, or striking deals without seeming to even have a negotiating position.



OTSHAYYUK (LEADER)

SPECIES	GENDER	AGE
Droyne	Male	—

TRAITS			—	SKILLS
STR	5	INT	10	Admin 1, Advocate 2, Appeal 2, Awareness 1, Caste (leader) 2, Clairvoyance 2, Diplomat 2, Gun Combat (energy) 1, Leadership 2, Outsider (human) 3, Telepathy 2,
DEX	7	EDU	10	
END	6	PSI	10	
WEAPONS:	Claws (1D+2), Leader-Rod (3D+3)			
ARMOUR:	Leading-Armour (+15)			



SSARTSSE

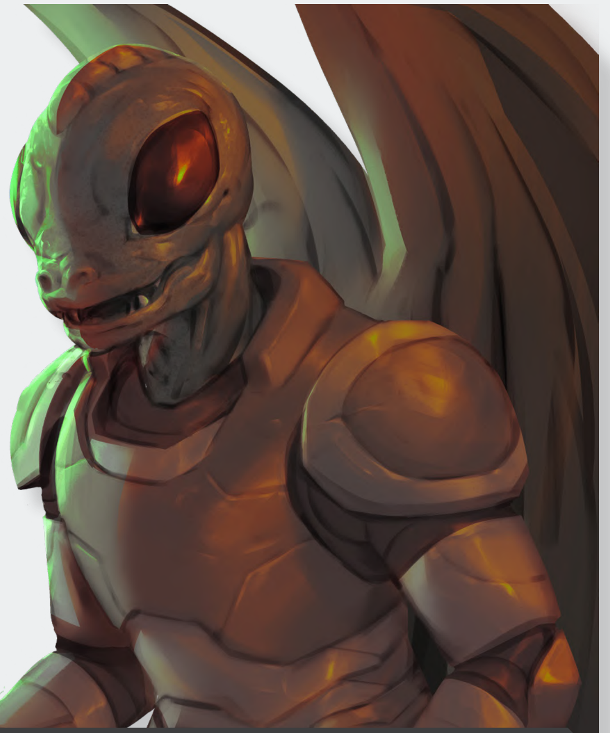
SPECIES	GENDER	AGE
Droyne	Female	—

TRAITS			—	SKILLS
STR	4	INT	10	Admin 1, Ancients Technology 4, Art (Droyne) 2, Awareness 2, Caste (drone) 4, Clairvoyance 1, Telepathy 1
DEX	9	EDU	7	
END	3	PSI	9	

WEAPONS:	Claws (1D+2), Leader-Rod (3D+3) if carried
ARMOUR:	Serving-Armour (+10)

SSARTSSE

Ssartes is a Droyne, who leads ceremonies aboard the ship and seems to have a mystical affinity with Ancients devices. She remains very much in the background and will not speak to outsiders if she can avoid it.



DIUSK

SPECIES	GENDER	AGE
Droyne	Male	—

TRAITS			—	SKILLS
STR	7	INT	9	Appeal 3, Ancients Technology 1, Carouse 2, Caste (sport) 2, Clairvoyance 1, Deception 2, Diplomacy 3, Gun Combat (energy) 2, Streetwise 3, Telepathy 1, Teleportation 3
DEX	7	EDU	7	
END	8	PSI	11	

WEAPONS:	Claws (1D+2), Leader-Rod (3D+3), Plasma Carbine (5D+2
ARMOUR:	Serving-Armour (+10)

DIUSK

Diusk is a Sport, an oddball within Droyne society who carries out duties away from the community and has skills that set him apart from most Droyne. He is respected but at the same time does not quite fit in and may be encountered operating away from the rest of the group, functioning as ambassador and spy. His teleportation power might enable him to get into parts of the Ancients base that others cannot and he might try to befriend the Travellers, perhaps playing the part of the confused and amusing but kinda dumb alien to gain trust.

DROYNE TECHNICIANS

SPECIES	GENDER	AGE
Droyne	—	—

TRAITS			—	SKILLS
STR	6	INT	8	Awareness 1–2, Caste (technician) 1–3, Telepathy 1–2, technical and spacecraft
DEX	9	EDU	9	
END	5	PSI	8	

WEAPONS:	Claws (1D+2), Defence-Rod (3D)
ARMOUR:	Serving-Armour (+10)

DROYNE WORKERS

SPECIES	GENDER	AGE
Droyne	—	—

TRAITS			—	SKILLS
STR	10	INT	3	Awareness 1, Caste (worker) 1–3, Mechanic 1
DEX	6	EDU	2	
END	11	PSI	4	

WEAPONS:	Claws (1D+2)
ARMOUR:	Serving-Armour (+10)

DROYNE WARRIORS

SPECIES	GENDER	AGE
Droyne	—	—

TRAITS			—	SKILLS
STR	10	INT	4	Awareness 1–2, Caste (warrior) 1–3, Gun Combat (energy) 2, Gunner 1–2, Recon 1, Telepathy 1-
DEX	8	EDU	3	
END	8	PSI	7	

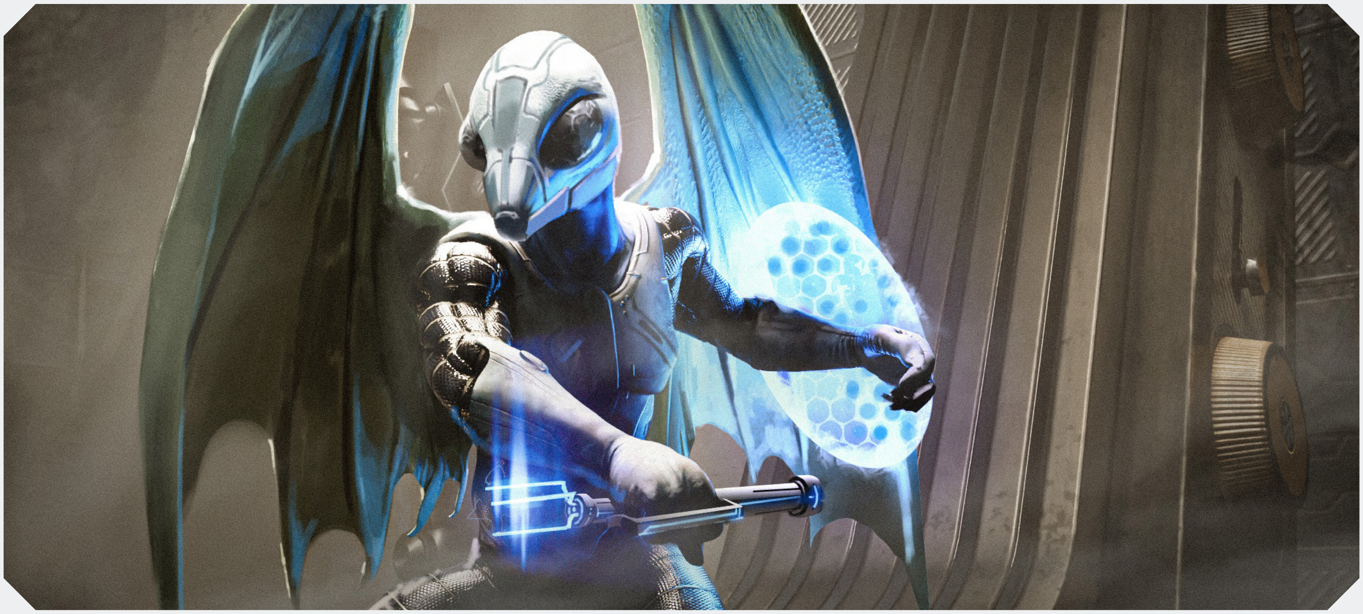
WEAPONS:	Claws (1D+2), Plasma Carbine (5D+2)
ARMOUR:	Fighting-Armour (+15), Eclipse Shield

DROYNE WORKERS

SPECIES	GENDER	AGE
Droyne	—	—

TRAITS			—	SKILLS
STR	3	INT	7	Art (Droyne) 1, Awareness 1–2, Caste (drone) 1–3, Telepathy 1–2
DEX	6	EDU	8	
END	3	PSI	8	

WEAPONS:	Claws (1D+2)
ARMOUR:	Serving-Armour (+10)



YUSOTE'S SHIP

Yusote's starship is clearly of Droyne manufacture, and is composed of unusual alloys. It appears to be equivalent in most ways to a TL15–16 design but components and materials are of a non-standard type. Costs are an estimate based on an equivalent human vessel; Droyne do not think in terms of Credits but would consider only the time and effort that went into the vessel. The vessel's displacement may be significant to the Oytrip that built it but outsiders have no way of knowing.

The main hull is generally cylindrical, growing fatter towards a point about two-thirds of the way aft. Four large blisters project from the flanks at the one-third and two-thirds points. These contain landing gear and access hatches for personnel. The hull is designed in a style known as 'auspicious of seeking', which is seen in some Droyne vessels. The overall configuration and equipment of the vessel provides DM+1 on all Astrogation and Electronics (sensors) checks.

The vessel does not have a standard bridge, instead having a ship-heart citadel located in the broadest part of the hull. This is more grandiose and ornamental than a mere bridge and fulfils more functions. The ship-heart has a domed ceiling and a dais for the ship's Leader. His command chair is reminiscent of a throne and it is here he receives visitors, petitioners and emissaries. This area is surrounded by heavy bulkheads as well as having its own life support system. It can be ejected from the ship but this act must be accompanied by funeral rites for the vessel – it will self-destruct as soon as its heart is no longer present.

The citadel is gorgeously decorated with iridescent patterns depicting the vessel's history and Oytrip affiliation, and serves as a briefing room (giving DM+1 on Tactics checks for any pre-planned operation), commercial activity centre (DM+1 on Broker checks) and coordination chamber for other activities such as surveys, groundside exploration or a construction project undertaken planetside but commanded from the ship.

The vessel's accommodation is typical of Droyne vessels, arranged in groups of six sleeping pods surrounded by a working and living area. Droyne accommodated in pod-clusters have all necessary supporting facilities, including everything from armouries to a galley. Each pod-cluster can function as an emergency shelter for crew, allowing them to remain safe if the ship is depressurised, and can be jettisoned from the ship when critical damage is taken.

This is a very prestigious vessel and as such all common areas and workspaces are beautifully decorated and contain statues, raised seating for important officials and everything necessary for in-flight ritual observances. These are designated minor ceremonial spaces and sufficient for routine rituals of the sort associated with daily life and crew duties. These general, or ceremonial, spaces contain workshop and laboratory areas and are distributed around the ship in a manner that makes little sense to most outsiders.

Groundside access for personnel is possible through each of the side blisters, using an extendable grav-lift capable of containing four people at once. The main access point is a ramp extending from the underside of the main hull, which leads into the cargo area. Handling of cargoes is usually performed using highly advanced grav plates to locally levitate containers or items and smaller grav-trolleys to move items outside. The ship is configured for mass cargo movements and might make an inefficient trader.

Armament consists of a powerful weapon referred to as a tachyon cannon by human observers, backed up by a fusion gun barbette mounted on each of the side blisters and four conventional laser mounts. Nuclear dampers, meson screens and a black globe generator provide defence, with hull armour of highly advanced materials as a last resort.

A human ship of this sort would require a crew of about 27; less if combat is not expected. However, this is a Droyne ship and does not operate on standard human lines. It has capacity for 36 individuals and will usually run with a little less than that. This includes sufficient personnel to operate the ship plus those needed for groundside operations and the daily life of a group of Droyne travelling far from home.

YUSOTE'S SHIP

TL: Special		Tons	Cost (MCr)
Hull	962 tons, Streamlined, Auspicious of Seeking	—	230.88
Armour	Molecular Bonded, Armour: 20	96.2	2886
M-Drive	Thrust 6 (energy efficient x3)	57.72	173.16
J-Drive	Jump-4 (decreased fuel x3)	101.2	227.7
Power Plant	Fusion (TL15), Power 1,200	60	120
Fuel Tanks	J-4, 20 weeks of operation	357.08	—
Bridge	Ship-Heart Citadel	40	12.025
Computer	Core/50	—	60
Sensors	Advanced	5	5.3
Weapons	Small Tachyon Cannon Bay	50	15
	Fusion Barbettes x 4	20	16
	Triple Turrets (pulse lasers) x4	4	16
	Meson Screens x2	20	40
	Nuclear Dampers x2	20	20
	Black Globe Generator	50	100
	Drive Capacitor (Power 1,012)	—	—
Systems	Repair Drones	10	2
	Deep Penetration Scanners	6	6
	Improved Signal Processing	1	4
	Life Scanner Analysis Suite	1	4
	Mineral Detection Suite	—	5
	Military Countermeasures Suite	15	28
	Fuel Processor (100 tons/day)	5	0.25
Software	Library	—	—
	Manoeuvre/0	—	—
	Evade/2	—	2
	Jump Control/4	—	0.4
	Advanced Fire Control/2	—	15
	Auto-Repair/2	—	10
Staterooms	Ejectable Pod-Clusters x6	144	136
	Ceremonial Space	230	57.5
Cargo		381	—
Total: MCr674.475			

Crew

Captain, Pilot, Astrogator, Gunners x15, Engineers x7, Maintenance, Officer

Hull: 385

Running Costs

MAINTENANCE COST

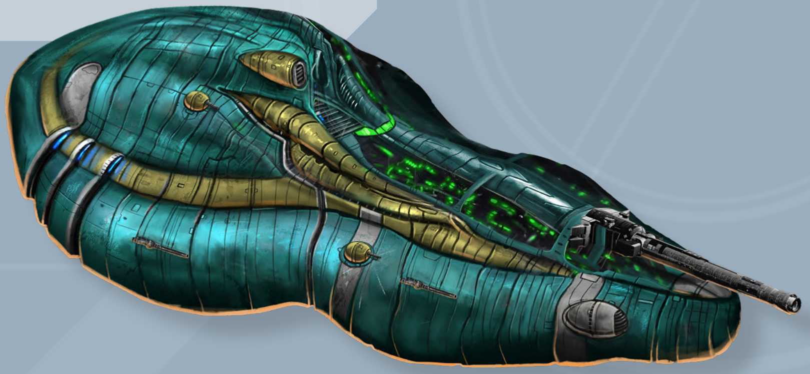
Cr56206/month

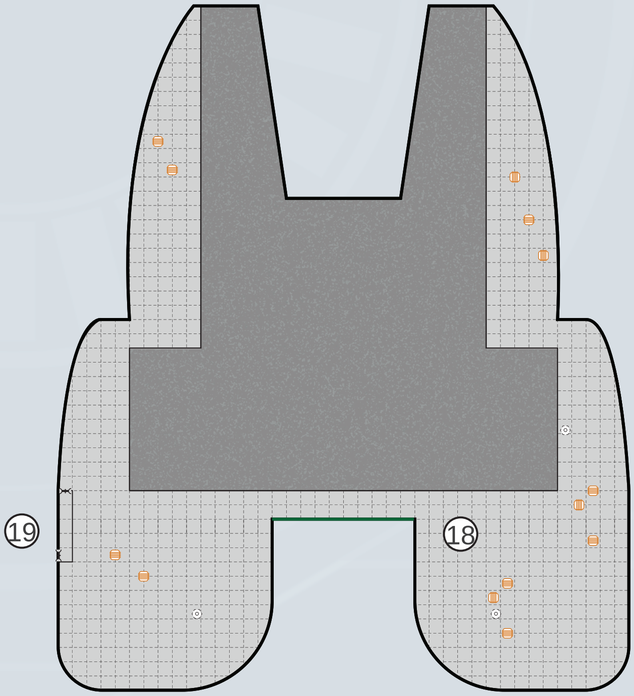
PURCHASE COST

MCr674.475

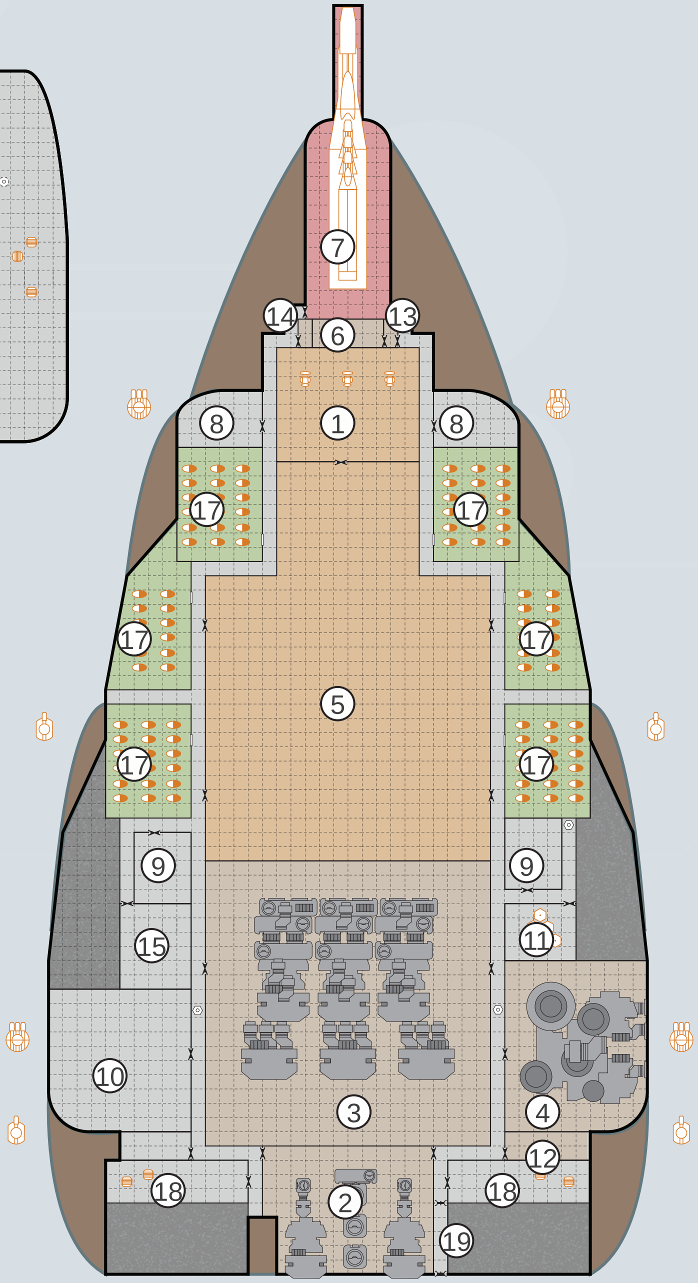
Power Requirements

Basic Ship Systems	193
Manoeuvre Drive	145
Jump Drive	385
Sensors	6
Weapons	272
Systems	13





DECK 1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DECK 2

LEGEND

1. Bridge
2. Manoeuvre drive
3. Jump drive
4. Power plant
5. Ceremonial space
6. Sensors
7. Tachyon cannon bay
8. Meson screens
9. Nuclear dampers
10. Black globe generator
11. Repair drones
12. Deep penetration scanners
13. Improved signal processing
14. Life scanner analysis suite
15. Military countermeasures suite
16. Fuel processor
17. Ejectable pod-clusters
18. Cargo
19. Airlock

1 square = 0.5 Ton

AN AUDIENCE WITH YUSOTE

It is possible that the Travellers escaped from Calefaction without taking up Yusote's offer of an audience. If so, at some point Yusote will send his group's ambassador to meet the Travellers, a Sport named Diusk, whom the Travellers might already have met under rather odd circumstances. If the Travellers are aboard Yusote's ship when the invitation is made, the audience can take place immediately. If not, Diusk approaches them to make arrangements.

The reason behind this approach is flattering to the Travellers, in a way. Yusote has deduced that they are both knowledgeable and competent, which means they could be an obstacle to his mission. Or they might be an asset. Yusote wants to find hidden Ancients sites and clear them of artefacts. The Travellers will be a problem if they get there first, unless of course they can be persuaded to work with or for Yusote. The Droyne want to find out what they know and explore possibilities but Yusote would be quite happy just to find a way to take the Travellers out of the game for a while.

Whichever way it happens, the first point of contact is Diusk. He knows a lot more about non-Droyne cultures than most of his kind, although there are misconceptions and gaps in his knowledge. He is also adept at making outsiders think he understands less than he does. Diusk will tailor his approach to the group. He may pretend he has mistaken the Travellers for traders and try to buy a cargo from them or engage their services to transport cargo a long distance. This is likely if the Travellers seem to be onto something – the job will be real and well paid but will take them away from the region for a while.

In order to disarm their suspicions, Diusk will try to convince the Travellers that he is a bit clueless. They may find him amusing, helping him out of whatever scrapes he gets into due to his lack of understanding of local customs. Other gambits Diusk might try include asking the Travellers to act as brokers or agents for his Leader, who wants to buy items that might include something ridiculous like the subsector admiral's personal dress uniform or a quantity of nuclear warheads. He may also ask them to find out information that a Droyne could not, such as details about the local underworld or an entirely innocuous local society. This is a way of testing the waters, finding out what the Travellers can and are willing to do.

Diusk informs the Travellers his Leader would like to meet with them and hear their tales. If they agree they will be given an opportunity to dress accordingly – assuming they have anything to change into – and prepare themselves. They are then escorted into the presence of the great Yusote in his ship-heart citadel. This is an occasion of great solemnity. Yusote sits on his dais, flanked by his assistant leader and senior members of his group. Warriors and Workers stand immobile nearby. They occasionally move, all at once and in exactly the same way. After a few seconds of perfectly synchronised movement, stillness returns.

The Travellers have an opportunity to observe the alien splendour of Yusote's command chamber. Its smooth curves are decorated with swirling patterns and most colours are light and subtle; variations on silver-grey with a pearlescent sheen. All the senior Droyne are in full regalia, moving and speaking with a great sense of ceremony. The Travellers are expected to realise they stand in the presence of A Leader and to at least vaguely comprehend what that means.

Diusk introduces the Travellers with a lengthy speech about who they are and what they have achieved, delivered both in the Droyne language of Oynprith and in Galanglic. Occasionally he gets something hilariously wrong, stating with complete gravitas that the Travellers are feared and respected in the delicatessens of the Spinward Marches, or that they saved the life of an extremely important shoebox. Giggles will go unremarked, as if the Droyne had not noticed the gaffe.

Likewise, Yusote is thoroughly praised. The gist of it is that he is A Leader of Leaders, worthy of leading other Leaders and renowned across the stars for his wisdom and knowledge. Diusk mentions a great many projects and incidents which reflect well upon Yusote, most of which is utterly incomprehensible to outsiders. Between the lines, the Travellers may realise the essentials of the situation – Leaders are A Big Deal to the Droyne and those who lead other Leaders even more so. They are expected to treat Yusote with great respect and maybe just do whatever he wants without question. There is no threat in what is said but it is clear that Yusote expects to be obeyed and would be a powerful foe.

Introductions made, the Travellers are ushered to a table where a feast has been laid in their honour. The Drones perform some sort of ceremony over the food and Yusote grants permission to eat with a gracious gesture. At no point does he speak; everything is said for him by Disuk or occasionally one of the Drones. The feast is an attempt at human food, consisting of all manner of unusual and mismatched dishes and excellent but ill-chosen wines. There is fruit from distant worlds and cheese from… it might be better not to know.

Whilst Yusote and the Travellers dine, Diusk tells tales of distant star systems where beasts of pure energy frolic in the rings of a gas giant and of temples built on the surface of a frozen star. The Referee might draw on the *Great Rift* or *Deepnight Revelation* box sets for inspiration here. In return, the Droyne request the Travellers tell tales of their adventures or the stories of their people. The Droyne listen intently to the most mundane and trivial escapades, following each with ritual exclamations about how magnificent everyone present is.

If the Travellers have any Ancients artefacts in their possession Yusote will take note but he will not attempt to seize them at this time. He has a bigger concern and hopes the Travellers might provide some clues to its whereabouts. Indeed, they can since Yusote's goal – although he does not know this yet – is the Ancients base at Twilight's Peak. However, he does not reveal his intentions to anyone. If the Travellers ask why they have been thus honoured, Diusk tells them all he ever will – 'Our Leader wished it'.

The Travellers might come away amused and baffled, and if the Referee can convince them that this was just a strange and random occurrence, so much the better. However, the feast was intended as an opportunity to find out what the Travellers know. Psionic scans will be attempted by several of the Droyne, aided by getting the Travellers into a tale-telling mindset. Unless all the Travellers present have psionic shields, Yusote will know everything they do up to this point. There will be no immediate consequences but it will fill in some of the blanks in his knowledge and allow him to move closer to his goal.

YUSOTE IS MYSTERIOUS

Like most of his kind, Yusote is prone to ignore questions and never provides an explanation of what he is doing. He will interact with the Travellers and other people if it furthers his agenda but he is entirely focused and will not do anything that does not move him closer to his goal unless there is a good reason. Yusote knows enough about Imperial society to recognise the need for a little deception in his actions. He never lies to anyone; he and his followers merely ignore the question. However, Yusote could be tracked and his movements used to discover secrets, so he will occasionally go to a completely random location and hang around there just being mysterious.

More commonly, Yusote conceals his movements and location using simple measures. If he needs to go from system A to system B, he will take a roundabout route or just park his ship somewhere it will not be detected for a few weeks. This creates the illusion he has been on a long voyage elsewhere. Alternatively, he might pick a port and make a point of being seen every time he needs to go somewhere. This will make his pattern of movements very confusing and cause observers to wonder what the significance of the visit might be.

In short, Yusote never goes directly to his goal unless he can do so without being detected. He is prepared to spend years doing something that could be completed in weeks if it preserves secrecy and is deliberately enigmatic and mysterious because it suits his purposes. As soon as this poise is no longer useful, Yusote will begin to operate more directly.

THE CONFERENCE OF AKI

The events at Calefaction have drawn the attention of Omicron Division, a covert organisation operated by the Imperium. Its main purpose is to investigate and counter the 'Ancients Threat' and any other major but non-obvious threats to the stability or even existence of the Imperium. Omicron Division operates under a full Imperial Warrant, which essentially means its leaders can do anything they deem necessary and all other Imperial officials are required to assist to the best of their ability. However, Omicron Division prefers to remain in the shadows as much as possible.

If Omicron Division is aware of the Travellers, which is likely if they have been interacting with the Ancients Hunter community, they will urgently want to speak with them. The Travellers are not suspected of deliberately blowing up Calefaction but everyone who was there is a person of interest. Omicron Division is well aware that people poking around in Ancients sites can cause all manner of problems even if they do not intend to. The Referee should use the system on page 23 to determine the authorities' level of interest. If they have done enough to trigger any form of investigation, Omicron Division will suspect them of being involved with the destruction of Calefaction. Otherwise, the Division simply wants to know what the Travellers saw whilst they were on-planet.

Either way, Omicron Division is now actively watching for the Travellers and will try to learn more about them. They could simply put out an arrest warrant and have every naval ship in the subsector hunt the Travellers down but they are usually more subtle than that. Deception will allow them to net several persons of interest all at once. Their instrument in this matter is none other than Aish Nirka, the Captain of Knowledge himself. His delusional personality and massive ego make him an easy mark for the Division's agents.

The plan was already in motion when the Travellers arrived on Calefaction but it has been expanded and made a little more urgent. Playing on Aish Nirka's desire to be the greatest of all Ancients Hunters, they had an agent approach him with a proposition; a conference of the greatest minds in the Ancients Hunting community. The agent would provide a venue whilst the Captain of Knowledge would host the event. Surely no-one could turn down such an invitation, especially since it was all-expenses-paid and there would be a vid crew present to make a documentary about the event.

Aish Nirka sent out a number of invites and will be genuinely surprised when few people actually turn up – he was expecting everyone would want to see what he had to offer. However, the few who do attend the conference will serve the needs of Omicron Division. The venue is a chartered liner, which will be present at a secret location. The Captain of Knowledge sent out details of how to obtain the location to each invitee; each one with a different contact. The Travellers might find his attempt at secrecy to be laughable but he thinks he is being very clever. Omicron Squadron also put the word out, semi-discreetly, to the Ancients Hunter community. Most of those who know about the conference do not rate the Captain of Knowledge highly enough to make the effort but some do and there are others who find the lure of video cameras to be irresistible.

AN INVITATION

Wherever the Travellers make planetfall after Calefaction, most likely Caledonia, they will find a message waiting for them in the local datanet. This is from Aish Nirka. Its full text is found on page 299 but the gist of it is that he has convened a great conference of the finest minds in the Ancients Hunter community. He invites the Travellers to attend, saying he has secrets to reveal. It is typical of the Captain of Knowledge that he has made the death of one of the most prominent real Ancients Hunters all about himself but he actually does have some information – or rather, he thinks he does. The location will be provided by a contact at Weiss.

In fact, an operative from Omicron Division has provided Aish with some information, not all of it true, which has led to more of his incredible leaps of intuition. Whilst the Division is pretty sure what he has come up with is nonsense, they are willing to let the situation play out and see where it goes. The 'chartered liner' is in fact a vessel operated by Omicron Division as a covert intelligence-gathering platform. The Captain of Knowledge thinks it was hired on his behalf by his new contact, which is quite natural considering his vast importance in the Ancients Hunter community. In short, Aish Nirka has fallen for the whole thing and is currently flying around the Glisten subsector recording lectures on various subjects.

WIESS

Wiess is a world of little importance, other than its location. It has enough surface water for habitation but its atmosphere is extremely thin and barely breathable, even when compressed. For many years the only habitation was a small settlement maintained as a 'territorial anchor' by the Imperium. This changed after the Third Frontier War when an illegal colonisation operation landed tens of thousands of Sword Worlders on-planet. These were dissidents, unhappy with their lot in the Sword Worlds Confederation and requested asylum-en-masse. This was granted and the immigrants were placed under the governance of the tiny Imperial settlement.

Over time, the Sword Worlds immigrant population grew and was joined by a few Imperial settlers. The Spinward Development Corporation (SDC) invested in setting up some industry with the long-term goal of integrating the world's population into mainstream Imperial culture. SDC also built an extensive starport to foster cross-border trade, although this venture proved to be less than effective.

Local governance proved impossible and the strong traditions of the Sword Worlds resisted cultural assimilation. The answer was to impose direct rule from the subsector capital at Glisten and to expand the Imperial settlement. As a result, the downport and its associated startown are distinctly 'Imperial' in culture whilst the surrounding towns have a more 'Swordie' feel to them. This has actually worked to the advantage of the local economy, as items made on Weiss prove popular as novelties within the Imperium and sell better than Imperial goods in some places. There are also rumours that intelligence personnel are sometimes sent to Weiss to immerse themselves in Sword Worlds culture before deploying in the Confederation.

Weiss is Amber Zoned at present, as misunderstandings between Imperials and immigrants can lead to considerable friction. The population is considered loyal-within-limits, if for no stronger reason than they came to Wiess to escape problems in the Confederation and are unlikely to be welcomed back. The majority of the population seem content enough with their lot and any trouble is small in scale.

WEISS

UWP: A626464–B

Starport	A	Excellent
Size	6	9,600km
Atmosphere	2	Very thin; tainted
Hydrosphere	6	60%
Population	4	Tens of thousands
Government Type	6	Captive government/ colony
Law Level	4	Light assault weapons prohibited
Technology Level	B	Early stellar

WIESS HIGHPORT

Weiss Highport is large and was built to be a highly capable port. It has high-capacity freight docks as well as extensive smaller-vessel facilities. When constructed, it was heavily subsidised as a gateway port facilitating expansion of the trade routes through District 268. There were big plans, including a freightliner service to the Imperial enclave in the Five Sisters and another up the Bowman Arm to Darrian space. Both were implemented but not on anything like the scale expected. The handful of vessels assigned to these runs now bring in most of the port's revenue, with small-scale cross-border trade providing the majority of the remainder.

Many businesses moved into the highport, governed by the specially formed Weiss Starport Commission. This is a corporate body which owns the port and docks, along with some industry located at the port. Space was sold to private concerns and initially the project looked to be a big success. The expected expansion of trade never happened, however, and most of the businesses moved out or shut down. What remains is a pale shadow of what might have been and with too little income for proper maintenance the port is headed downhill quickly. On the surface it seems prosperous enough but those who look more closely will notice a lot of vacant business units and a veneer of quality over decaying infrastructure. Various attempts to turn the port's fortunes around have come to nothing and nobody seems interested in buying the place out at a price the owners can afford to sell at.

One consequence of this trend is a tendency for trade and spacefaring laws to be 'relaxed' whenever the operators think they can get away with it. Vessels that might not pass a spaceworthiness examination elsewhere are able to scrape a marginal pass and the port has been investigated several times in regard of dubious cargoes passing through. For a time there was a large Ministry of Justice contingent stationed at the highport to monitor cross-border traffic but this was withdrawn some time ago to handle other more pressing situations.

JUST PASSING THROUGH

As the Travellers arrive in the Wiess system, their sensors pick up an unusual vessel. Everything about it is odd; its tonnage, energy signatures and even the orbit it occupies. It is normal for vessels awaiting permission to approach the starport to enter a stable orbit but this ship is following a path that requires constant low-power corrections. There is no indication the ship actually wants to land at the port but if it does not then why is it hanging around in this manner? Shortly after the vessel comes to the Travellers' attention it breaks orbit in an unhurried manner and jumps out.

This is Yusote's ship, which has visited the system and left again without landing or sending anyone ashore. The Travellers may wonder if it might have been possible for Diusk or one of the other Droyne to teleport into the station but the distance is surely far too great. In fact there is nothing suspicious about Yusote's presence; he simply brought his ship here to be noticed in the hope of obfuscating his movements. The Travellers might never find that out and could drive themselves crazy trying to find a reason for the visit.

ACTIVITIES AT THE HIGHPORT

As with any port, the Travellers might avail themselves of the facilities at Weiss Highport. These are either rather basic or a faded echo of something that was once very good. Hotels that were once upmarket and expensive have retained their price tag but are now rather run-down. Malfunctions and a generally worn appearance are the norm. If the Travellers want to look for information they can always try but there is no established Ancients Hunter community at Weiss.

If the Travellers do not seek out Willem Rafem as the Captain of Knowledge suggested they should, he will notice their ship is in port but not contact them for a few days. He simply has better and more profitable things to do. Eventually he will get in touch even if the Travellers forget about him. Indeed, it is entirely possible the Travellers may become stuck in the course of the campaign and be unable to figure out where to go next. This interlude can be used to point them in the right direction. It can be inserted more or less anywhere, although it does require the Travellers to be somewhere they can be contacted and where there is a sufficiently large population to support some kind of business. The Referee should therefore relocate Rafem to whatever port the Travellers happen to be in.

Willem Rafem is a local entrepreneur. He has been contracted to provide information to the Travellers when they arrive and has nothing to do with Omicron Division. However, despite the fact that Rafem's public persona is that of a conventional business operator he is also an avid Ancients Hunter. Like most Wannabees he sees himself as at least a Player but in reality he is the usual sort. He watches amateur docuvids and participates in datanet arguments. He favours the hypothesis that the Ancients were overthrown by a gallant coalition of 'young' species, in much the same way the Vilani Imperium stagnated and was eventually toppled by upstarts from Terra. Rafem has no proof of any of this but according to him at least it is obviously true. He assumes the Ancients were humanoid but has no clear idea about this – not that it matters, since they are extinct.

The Travellers might not immediately realise Rafem is a Hunter. His approach (or response, if they contact him) is conventional and professional. He wants a meeting and is entirely happy to have dinner at one of the port's better restaurants or host the Travellers for a social gathering. In fact, he would prefer not to meet them at his office, although he will not make that obvious. Exactly what Rafem does for a living is up to the Referee and can be tailored to local conditions. In all probability it is something solid and mundane, such as import/exports or manufacturing of widely used but rather uninteresting components. Investigation of his firm shows up nothing out of the ordinary.

Rafem was contacted by the Captain of Knowledge and offered a fee to act as an intermediary. The two know one another vaguely through the datanets but have never actually met. They disagree on almost everything about the Ancients, other than the fact that they both find the subject compelling. Thus Rafem is fulfilling a business agreement but also indulging his obsession. This entirely suits him but it does cause him to go beyond what Aish Nirka wanted.

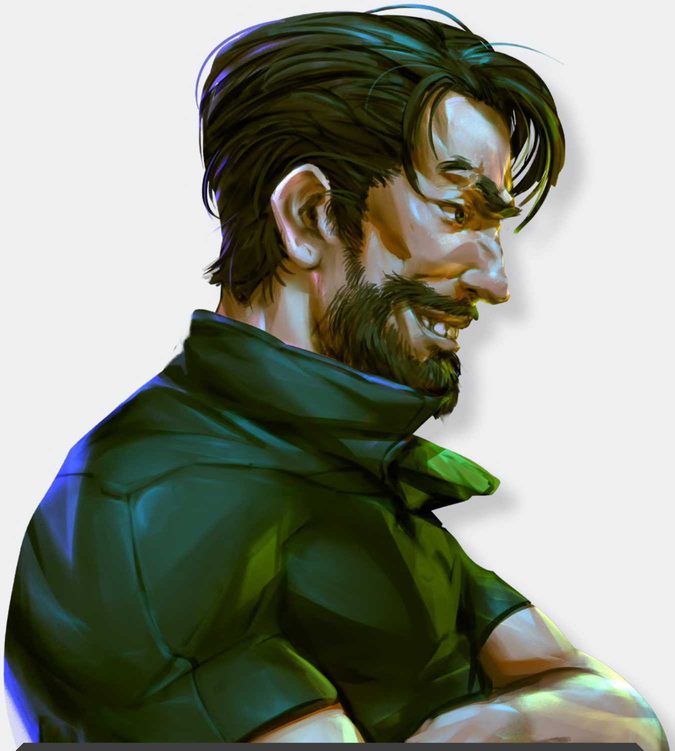
Rumours that the Travellers have found something interesting have reached Rafem and he naturally wants to talk with them. If they let him, he will have small drones film the entire interaction, allowing him to prove he met the newest rising stars of the hunting community. He will naturally want to hear every possible detail of their adventures and to see any artefacts the Travellers might have picked up. Rafem is an adept negotiator, so despite his enthusiasm he will remain polite and not push too hard. He will also hint at the benefits of having him as a friend and supporter. These are real, if less impressive than he hopes the Travellers will think. Rafem has a few contacts in the Ancients Hunter community and perhaps some of his business associates might be able to help the Travellers out with movement of objects and people, documentation and accreditation.

The meeting with Rafem is an opportunity to put the Travellers back on track. If they have forgotten about an important clue or location, it can be worked into the conversation. It is always best if the Travellers succeed by their own efforts, so if a gentle nudge will suffice the Referee can use Rafem to supply it. Some groups need detailed instructions, in which case the Referee will have to be more heavy-handed. Rafem can assist a little with researching objects or concepts but the Referee should resist the temptation to turn him into a 'quest giver'. His role in the campaign is intended to be slight; merely a conveyor of information and backup in case the Travellers get stuck. If they start bringing him everything they find or asking how to go about their tasks they will be disappointed. Rafem is, after all, just a Wannabee.

The meeting with Rafem is an odd mix of polite business and obsessive fanboyishness. Rafem does convey the information the Captain wanted him to – a convention has been set up aboard the liner *Pearl of Glisten.* The Travellers are invited, all expenses paid, and they will be able to meet some of the other prominent Ancients Hunters from the region. The conference is to convene in the Aki system, with the delegates picked up at the starport there. It is set to begin just a couple of days after the earliest the Travellers could get there. They might find this timing suspicious – and would be right to do so – but Rafem knows nothing about that. As far as he knows the conference is legitimate, even if it has been arranged by someone he disagrees with. He would have attended himself if he could spare the time.

WILLEM RAFEM, ENTREPRENEUR

Rafem is a successful businessman, which in this environment does require some dubious dealings. He is mostly legitimate and does have moral limits on how far he is willing to bend the import/export rules. He has been investigated and heavily fined by the Ministry of Justice but never for anything to do with Ancients artefacts. His value to the Travellers is as a contact and source of information, although like most Wannabees he knows far less than he thinks he does.



WILLEM RAFEM, ENTREPRENEUR

SPECIES		GENDER		AGE
Human		Male		38

TRAITS			—	SKILLS
STR	3	INT	10	Admin 2, Advocate 2, Broker 3, Diplomat 2
DEX	6	EDU	9	
END	7	SOC	7	

STOP AND SEARCH

As the Travellers leave Wiess starport they receive a signal from a previously undetected vessel. It is a Gazelle close escort whose transponder code identifies it as a vessel of the 100th Fleet – the subsector fleet assigned to protect Glisten and the surrounding systems. The Travellers are ordered to heave-to for boarding by the Imperial Navy. The reason given is 'routine stop and search' without further explanation.

The Travellers will be aware that the Weiss system is close to the Imperial border and is notorious for its lax customs process. There is nothing unusual about a vessel being boarded and inspected in such a system – or anywhere within the Imperium. The Gazelle was conceived as a small escort to protect larger vessels but is often encountered on patrol or guardship duty. Common practice is to lie just off the main approaches to a port and observe traffic until a suspect vessel comes by, or to stop one in so many for random searches. Whilst lying in wait it is common to reduce emissions to a minimum.

The Travellers do not have anything to fear as long as they cooperate with the search. It is entirely legal and they are required to submit. A vessel that tries to run will be assumed to be doing something illegal and the navy is empowered to fire on it if it refuses to stop. Likewise, interfering in the boarding is a crime and resistance will be met with force. The Travellers will know (or can look up in the databases) that the Gazelle does not carry marines but is armed with a pair of powerful particle accelerator barbettes and two beam laser turrets.

The Travellers would be well advised not to resist the boarding attempt. Even if their ship was powerful enough to incinerate the Gazelle, they would be taking on the Imperial Navy. Escalation is inevitable, making the Travellers fugitives for the rest of their days. They might, however, try to avoid the boarding by some ruse. The Gazelle's captain has no real suspicions of the Travellers; this is genuinely just a routine stop. If something more urgent came up, such as a distress call from another vessel, the search would most likely be abandoned and the Travellers allowed to proceed.

BOARDING PARTY

The Travellers receive a cordial but authoritative signal from the Gazelle:

'INS Rénszarvas, Lieutenant Sir Elix DuGarnu commanding.

Compliments of the Imperial Navy, 100th Fleet, Glisten Subsector.

You are requested to heave-to for boarding and inspection. Remain on your current vector and keep weapons powered down. Delays will be kept to a necessary minimum.'

This is phrased as a polite request but it is no such thing. Unless the Travellers trick the naval vessel or do something monumentally stupid they will indeed be boarded. The boarding party is transferred by way of the Gazelle's gig, with the warship itself remaining in a position to chase or fire upon a fleeing target. In the gig are two crewmembers, who remain close to the craft's airlock to protect it and a boarding party of four. This comprises the Gazelle's first officer, an engineer acting as a technical advisor and two armed crewmembers.

So long as the Travellers are compliant the inspection is carried out in a cordial manner. The officer asks permission to come aboard and is polite about requesting documentation. She and one of the armed crewmembers ask to see the bridge and look over paperwork regarding any cargo. The technical advisor and the other crewmember want to see the engineering spaces and look over maintenance logs. All four will meet in the cargo area and conduct a cursory inspection.

The officer is armed with a dress sword and navy-model gauss pistol, whilst the others have snub pistols. The two armed crewmembers in addition carry snub carbines and wear flak jackets. They are not expecting trouble and not especially wary; just following standing orders. Indeed, the whole inspection is carried out in a going-through-the-motions manner. The 100th Fleet is something of a backwater and a dumping-ground for merely adequate personnel and these seem to be just that.

If the Travellers have something to hide it should not be all that difficult to conceal it. The boarders are ticking a box rather than looking for something specific or following up on an alert. They will not look in personal accommodation unless suspicions are piqued and are unlikely to notice anything unless it really stands out. Even then, the Travellers may be able to offer an explanation or deflect questions. Implying that finding something will result in paperwork is a good deterrent but any plausible story – backed up by an Average (8+) Diplomat or Deception check – should deflect questioning. This of course assumes the Travellers have proper documentation for their ship. If they are using *Garnette* with permission this will suffice; paperwork for their own ship is the Travellers' responsibility.

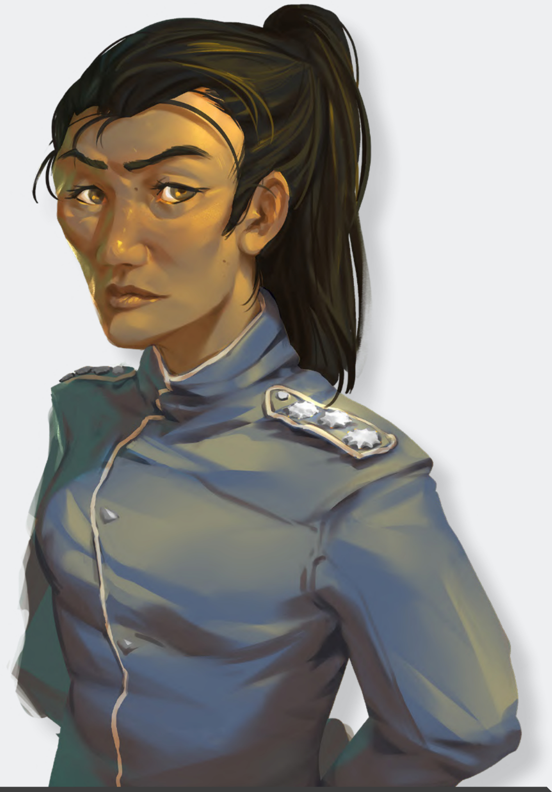
The Travellers should get the impression that this crew is not all that sharp. They are by no means incompetent but are not recruiting poster space-heroes. The encounter is not necessary to advance the campaign plot at this time but may become relevant later.

SUBLIEUTENANT IKIIR ZIKAA

Ikiir Zikaa is a typical junior officer in the 100th Fleet. She comes from a middle-class background and graduated naval academy with good grades but never made the connections necessary for rapid advancement. She is more talented than her superior but has become resigned to the role social status plays in the Imperial Navy. Her best option is to be a loyal supporter of someone with a 'name', no matter how minor, and to climb the ladder with him. It is common for commanding officers of small patrol ships to be lieutenants rather than possessing 'command rank' as these vessels have limited initiative. In this role Sir Elix is competent enough but lacks the imagination and drive to go much further in the navy. Ikiir hopes to transfer her talents to a more promising commanding officer; for now, she gets the job done and makes sure the paperwork is correct.

TECHNICAL ADVISOR, PETTY OFFICER

It is typical with small ships for personnel to be 'borrowed' from their posts when a boarding party is needed. In this case the Gazelle's engineering department has loaned a petty officer. This sort of boarding is routine but never entirely without danger. Enlisted personnel are there to get the job done and return to their ship as efficiently as possible, and will not enter into lengthy conversations with the Travellers.



SUBLIEUTENANT IKIIR ZIKAA

SPECIES	GENDER	AGE
Human	Female	30

TRAITS			—	SKILLS
STR	6	INT	10	Admin 2, Gun Combat (slug) 1, Gunner (turret) 1, Leadership 1, Vacc Suit 1
DEX	9	EDU	11	
END	8	SOC	7	
WEAPONS:	Dress Sword (2D), Gauss Pistol (3D, AP 3, Auto 2)			

TECHNICAL ADVISOR, PETTY OFFICER

SPECIES	GENDER	AGE
—	—	—

TRAITS			—	SKILLS
STR	7	INT	8	Engineer (power) 2, Gun Combat (slug) 1, Mechanic 2, Vacc Suit 1
DEX	8	EDU	11	
END	7	SOC	7	
WEAPONS:	Snub Pistol (3D-3, Zero-G)			

ARMED CREWMEMBERS

Security for the boarding party is provided by two of the Gazelle's gunners. They are not talkative and will direct all questions and protests to the officer.

ARMED CREWMEMBERS

SPECIES	GENDER	AGE
—	—	—

TRAITS			—	SKILLS
STR	8	INT	6	Gun Combat (slug) 1, Gunner (turret) 1, Vacc Suit 1
DEX	7	EDU	6	
END	8	SOC	5	

WEAPONS:	Cutlass (3D), Snub Carbine (3D-2, Zero-G), Snub Pistol (3D-3, Zero-G)
ARMOUR:	Flak Jacket (+5)

GIG CREW

The gig crew remain behind a closed airlock door and will not open it for the Travellers. Interactions are unlikely unless the boarding turns hostile.

GIG CREW

SPECIES	GENDER	AGE
—	—	—

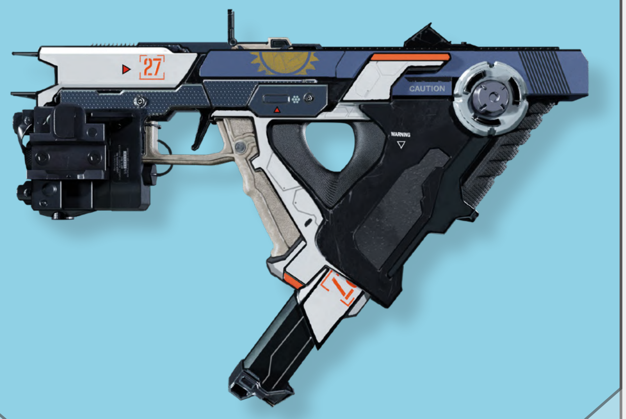
TRAITS			—	SKILLS
STR	5	INT	7	Gun Combat (slug) 1, Gunner (turret) 1, Vacc Suit 1
DEX	8	EDU	6	
END	7	SOC	5	

WEAPONS:	Baton (2D), Snub Pistol (3D-3, Zero-G)

NAVY SECURITY WEAPONS

The Imperial Navy favours short-barrelled, semi-automatic weapons firing a relatively low-powered but heavy cartridge for its shipboard weapons. Known almost universally as 'snub weapons', the commonest of these are handguns. A revolver variant, firing the same cartridge, is popular with some users. In addition to snub pistols carried as sidearms, a carbine version is also in use. Its slightly longer barrel produces a higher muzzle velocity but it is still not a weapon for heavy combat in the open. The advantages of these weapons are that they are quick on target at close range and unlikely to bowl the user over when firing in low or microgravity.

The snub carbine can take the same 10-round magazine as the semi-automatic pistol, or an extended 25-round magazine. Standard loadouts for security personnel include a pistol and two spare magazines in a belt holster, possibly with a baton or a cutlass on the opposite side. Those carrying out technical or administrative tasks will not usually carry the baton, as it gets in the way, but will be issued a sidearm if boarding a vessel or otherwise going in potential harm's way. 'Armed' crewmembers are issued a flak jacket and carbine. Standard load is a 25-round magazine in the carbine and two more in pockets on the jacket, plus a snub pistol with two additional magazines holstered at the hip. A cutlass is often also carried, largely for as a deterrent.



AKI

Lying one parsec from Glisten, Aki is a heavily populated and highly industrialised world which plays a significant part in the subsector economy. For this reason its highport is geared towards handling industrial and raw materials cargo rather than passengers and minor freight. Ore ships ply between the port and the system's planetoid belt, where a significant extraction economy is operated by various companies.

The world is currently Amber Zoned due to a long history of popular unrest and this does not seem likely to change in the near future. Various schemes intended to relive pressures or distract the populace have produced poor results. The Imperial authorities are not unduly concerned; so long as there is no disruption of the subsector economy the affairs of the planetary population are their own. As a result, the downport and industrial areas tend to be heavily and vigorously policed. Offworlders sometimes wonder why there is an Amber Zone in place since the areas they visit are safe and well-regulated. Straying beyond these zones results in a rather different experience.

AKI

UWP: B543987–9

Starport	B	Good
Size	5	8,000km
Atmosphere	4	Thin; tainted
Hydrosphere	3	30%
Population	9	Billions
Government Type	8	Civil service bureaucracy
Law Level	7	Shotguns prohibited
Technology Level	9	Pre-stellar

AKI HIGHPORT

As the Travellers approach the port they get a good impression of its character. The commercial and industrial docks are much bigger than the general-freight terminal and there will always be one or more bulk freighters in system. A guardship from the 100th Fleet might be present; Aki is one of the places the navy likes to show the flag. If this is the case the vessel is likely to be an old destroyer or small patrol ship. The world's own system defence flotilla is rather small, consisting mainly of fighters based out of the highport. These can be spotted roving in pairs to 'eyeball' incoming vessels.

The port itself is busy and acceptably efficient, with the usual complement of shops and entertainment facilities. A quick look at the shipping registers indicates the *Glisten Pearl* is due in a day or so, en route from the subsector capital. The Travellers will have to find something to do until it arrives but that problem might be solved for them by the arrival of a familiar vessel.

AN ODD REQUEST

The Travellers are approached by a party of Droyne, including Warriors and Drones, led by Diusk. He says he has a mutually beneficial proposal for them, which he would like to present over dinner. If the Travellers agree, Diusk arranges to meet them at the most expensive and exclusive restaurant in the vicinity. The establishment is entirely empty of customers apart from the Travellers and Diusk, who has clearly booked the entire place.

Diusk attempts to copy a 'deal over dinner' ploy used by businesspersons all over Charted Space but it is clear his understanding of Imperial culture is flawed and patchy. Likewise, his appreciation for human food is rather strange. He orders three different dishes at each course and mixes them to create some truly weird combinations. He tries to make small talk but chooses odd topics such as an obscure animated series for children that only aired for a few weeks a decade ago.

The awkwardness is real. Like many Droyne Diusk has a flawed understanding of the culture of outsiders. However, he is playing up the gaps in his knowledge to make the Travellers believe he is incompetent. Unfortunately for him, the real flaws in his understanding of Imperial culture might make him overdo this to the point where the Travellers see through his poise. Ideally, the Travellers will come to regard interactions with Diusk and his Leader as something of a comedy interlude in the campaign and only later realise he had a deadly serious purpose.

Diusk's proposal is rather strange. He explains – truthfully, although this is only a part of the truth – that he is a Sport, a caste that serves as ambassadors for Droyne communities, and in order to serve well in that capacity he needs to improve his understanding of the cultures he interacts with. His people place great significance on the design of tools and objects – again, this is true – and he feels he can learn a great deal about the Imperial culture if he can assemble the right collection of objects. Unfortunately, he has no idea where to start.

Therefore, Diusk wants the Travellers to present him with six objects that define Imperial culture or encapsulate the human psyche. He says that his Leader will reward the Travellers generously if they succeed in selecting the right items. He has no idea what they might be but is certain that he will know when he sees the correct items together. There is actually a lot of truth in all of this but Diusk's Leader also wants to keep the Travellers close as he suspects they know something important. If pressed about the nature of the reward Diusk is genuinely puzzled. Droyne Leaders reward followers as they think best and naturally any reward is the right one, otherwise the Leader would not have bestowed it. He says the Travellers might be able to ask for something if that is their way. Precious items, information or perhaps a favour might be bestowed. Diusk has not really given any thought to the nature of the reward; that is the business of his Leader when the time comes.

The objects do not have to be delivered straight away and indeed there is an expectation that the Travellers will need time to ponder their choice and perform necessary rituals. Diusk and the Travellers will meet again, he is certain, and at the proper time they will be invited to present their choice of items. In the interim, Diusk wishes the Travellers a successful voyage and a fulfilling return to their homes.

Diusk's request is strange but real, although it serves an additional purpose. Yusote wants to know more about the Travellers and perhaps make use of them. This interaction is intended to foster familiarity between the two groups which could be useful in the future. The 'right time' for the delivery of the objects will not be for a while but in the interim there may be other passing encounters with Yusote's group. For example, just as the Travellers jump into a system they detect a ship with a familiar signature but it is in the course of jumping out. On another occasion the vessel is in port somewhere and is noted in passing, or a Traveller looking over the traffic logs realises Yusote's party has visited the system several times. Sighting a Droyne on the starport concourse may make paranoid Travellers wonder if it is one of Yusote's people.

THE *GLISTEN PEARL*

Finally, the liner *Glisten Pearl* arrives. She is a standard Type-M subsidised liner of 600 displacement tons and her captain is listed as Master Starfarer Aedhko Ueang. The Travellers may correctly deduce that he is a Vargr. They may even be privileged enough to interact with him. At first glance the ship appears to be in good order and her public records show no legal complications. If the Travellers are interested enough to watch her enter dock, the vessel seems to be competently piloted and really not out of the ordinary.

In fact, *Glisten Pearl* is not quite what she seems. She started life as a standard Type-M liner but was obtained by Omicron Division and discreetly converted. Not all of her crew are Omicron Division personnel; most believe they work for the captain and ship but are aware that it is not a standard vessel and does not operate like a conventional liner. They think they are making very good money doing legitimate but on-the-quiet intelligence work for contracted partners. Some suspect this is naval intelligence, others a corporate client. Most do not care; the work is lucrative and generally safe.

Conversion of the *Glisten Pearl* was done discreetly in a private yard owned by Omicron Division through a series of fronts. There are few outward signs and even internally the vessel seems normal. The biggest alteration was the addition of six triple turrets on pop-up mountings. Two are on the forward 'shoulders' of the ventral surface, with the remainder on the fore and aft dorsal areas of the main hull. This has necessitated one internal change – the spa rooms are no longer in service for passengers.

In addition, the manoeuvre drive has been replaced with an advanced variant using 75% less power, while the jump drive is fuel efficient. These conversions appear more or less identical to standard systems. The extra power is not currently needed but Omicron Division wanted to ensure the vessel could be further adapted in the future.

In addition to her functional alterations, *Glisten Pearl* has been internally refitted, with some parts of the ship repurposed. She is advertised as a ‘secure liner or high-value cargo conveyor’ and routinely carries passengers around the Glisten subsector. At times she seems to disappear from the shipping registers; on those occasions she has no passengers and is off doing something covert for Omicron Division.

However, most of the time she is engaged in legitimate operations and quietly gathering information along the way. Her internal setup is designed to give nothing away, with alterations easily passed off as repurposing and upgrades. In general, *Glisten Pearl* is furnished to a higher standard than most liners of her type and appears to every bit what she claims to be.

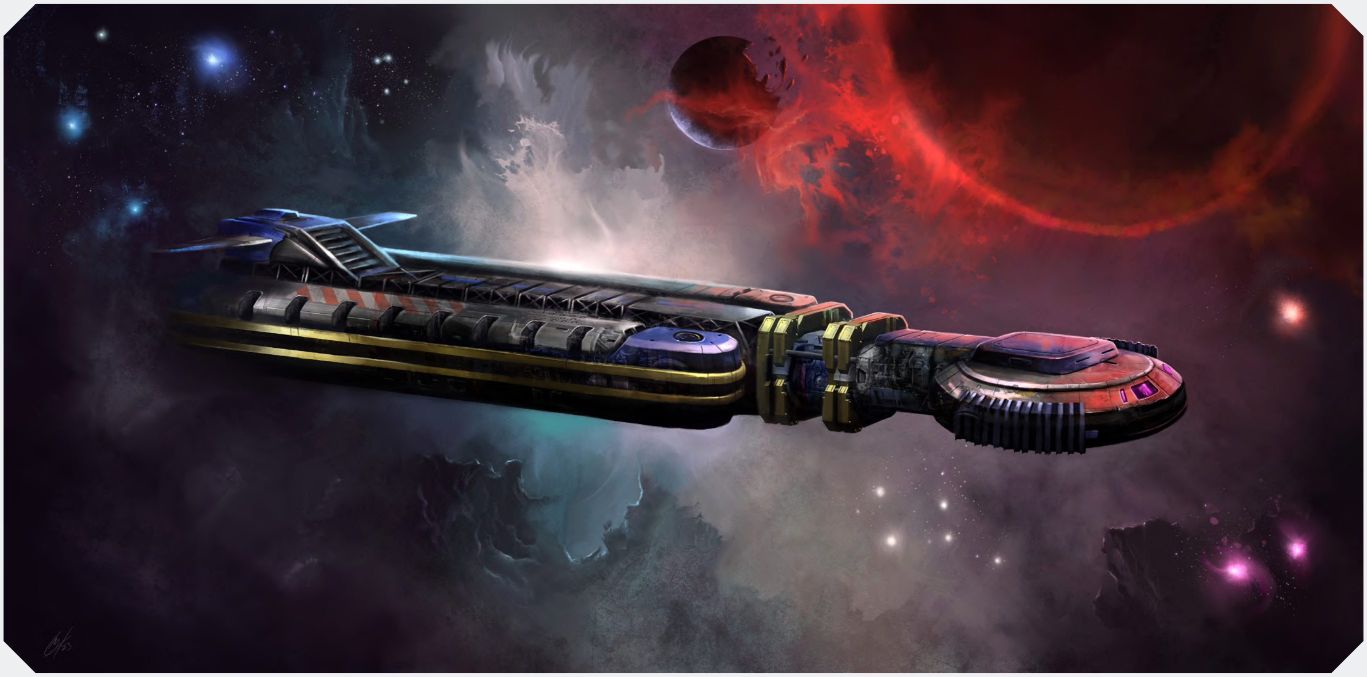
UPPER DECK ENGINEERING

The engineering spaces are off-limits to passengers under almost all circumstances. Occasionally some bigwig insists on a full tour but this rarely includes climbing the narrow staircase to the upper half of the engineering space. As a result, there is virtually no chance of anyone spotting the concealed hatch, apparently into the fuel tanks. The vessel’s reduced jump fuel requirement freed up 18 tons of space and, of this, 12 tons have been used. The result is an increase in on-station fuel duration of about 12 weeks; a little less if the launch is heavily used.

The 12 tons of fuel tankage that were converted have been set up as two chambers, one on each side of an accessway. They are surrounded by the dorsal fuel tank and unlikely to be detected on a scan. One chamber is a sensor and gunnery room, permitting the ship’s six turrets to be remotely controlled. Typically, the four dorsal mounts are grouped as a battery under the command of a gunner and the two ventral mounts as a second battery with its own operator. In action, the gunnery room is commanded by the ship’s first officer. The chamber also houses a Core/40 computer system which can run virtual gunner and targeting assistance software and which also serves as a data processing centre. Sensitive information is stored here, where it cannot be accessed by passengers fiddling about with the ship’s main computer.

The second chamber is an armoury, with far more space than the crew need for their weapons. When the liner is carrying out a covert operation it may be assigned additional personnel and heavy weapons. Currently the armoury contains a set of ground-combat equipment for each crewmember, which will be broken out at need, plus a few items for ‘special circumstances’.

Holstered on each set of personal combat equipment is a standard gauss pistol and there is a laser carbine for each crewmember. In addition, racks contain a gauss sniper rifle and a hand flamer (see the *Central Supply Catalogue*, page 146-149). There is a grenade box containing a (properly labelled) mix of fragmentation, concussion, tranq gas and tear gas grenades.



THE GLISTEN PEARL

TYPE: M

The subsidised liner is built for carrying passengers and cargo along lucrative routes, with amenities providing an elevated level of comfort and luxury. The high number of stewards includes cooks and entertainers, as well as shop, salon and gym staff. Overall, the ship is capable of carrying 24 passengers in addition to its crew, with a further 20 in low berths.

The three-parsec jump capability commands higher passenger and freight fees, and allows less desirable ports to be bypassed. Although the hull of the ship itself is only partially streamlined, a launch allows passengers to be ferried to the surface of a world or act as a lifeboat in emergencies.

TL12		Tons	Cost (MCr)
Hull	600 tons, Standard	—	30
M-Drive	Thrust 1 (energy efficient)	6	13.2
J-Drive	Jump 3 (decreased fuel x2)	50	93.75
Power Plant	Fusion (TL12), Power 360	24	24
Fuel Tanks	J-3, 4 weeks of operation	165	—
Bridge		20	2
Computer	Computer/10bis	—	0.24
Computer	Core/40		45
Sensors	Military Grade	2	4.1
Weapons	Triple Pop-Up Turrets (pulse lasers, sandcaster) x6	12	37.5
Craft	Docking Space (20 tons)	22	5.5
	Launch	—	2.83
Systems	Biosphere	1	0.2
	Gourmet Kitchen (12 diners)	12	2.4
	Swimming Pool	8	0.16
	Theatre	8	1.6
	Wet Bar	—	0.002
	Medical Bay	4	2
	Studios x 2 (shops, salons)	8	0.8
	Training Facilities (gym)	4	0.8
	Armoury	2	0.5
Staterooms	Standard x10	40	5
	High x10	60	8
	Low Berths	10	1
Software	Manoeuvre	—	—
	Library	—	—
	Intellect	—	—
	Jump Control/3	—	0.3
	Virtual Gunner/0	—	1
	Fire Control/3	—	6
Common Areas		84	8.4
Cargo		58	—
Total: MCr296.82			

Crew

Captain, Officer, Pilot, Astrogator, Engineers x2, Maintenance, Medic, Stewards x3, Gunners x2

Hull: 240

Running Costs

MAINTENANCE COST

Cr24735/month

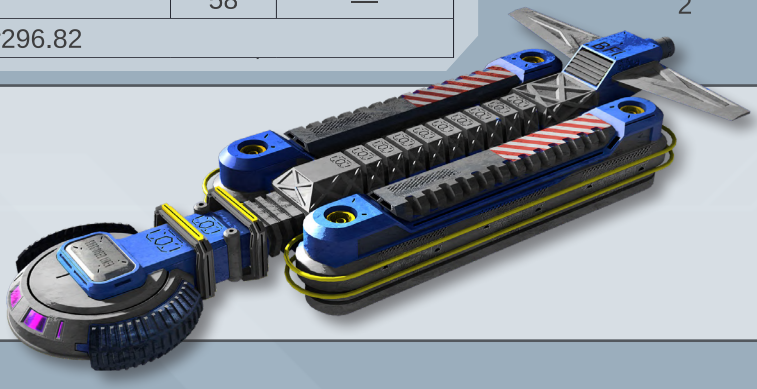
PURCHASE COST

MCr296.82

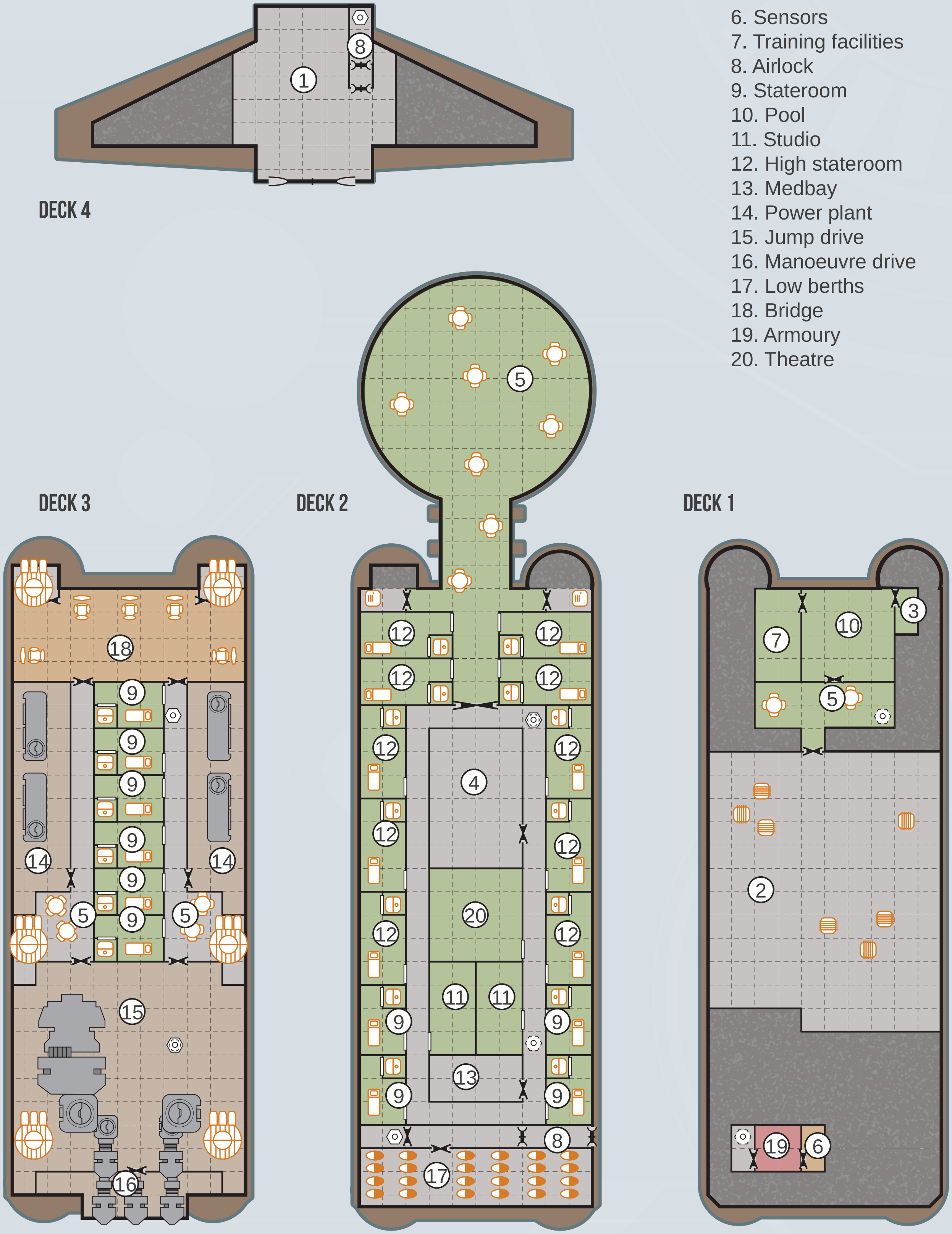
Power Requirements

Basic Ship Systems	120
Manoeuvre Drive	45
Jump Drive	180
Sensors	1
Weapons	54
Biosphere	1
Medical Bay	1
Low Berths	2

TYPE M SUBSIDISED LINER



1 square = 0.5 Ton


DECK 4
1
8
DECK 3
18
9
14
5
15
16
DECK 2
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12
4
20
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13
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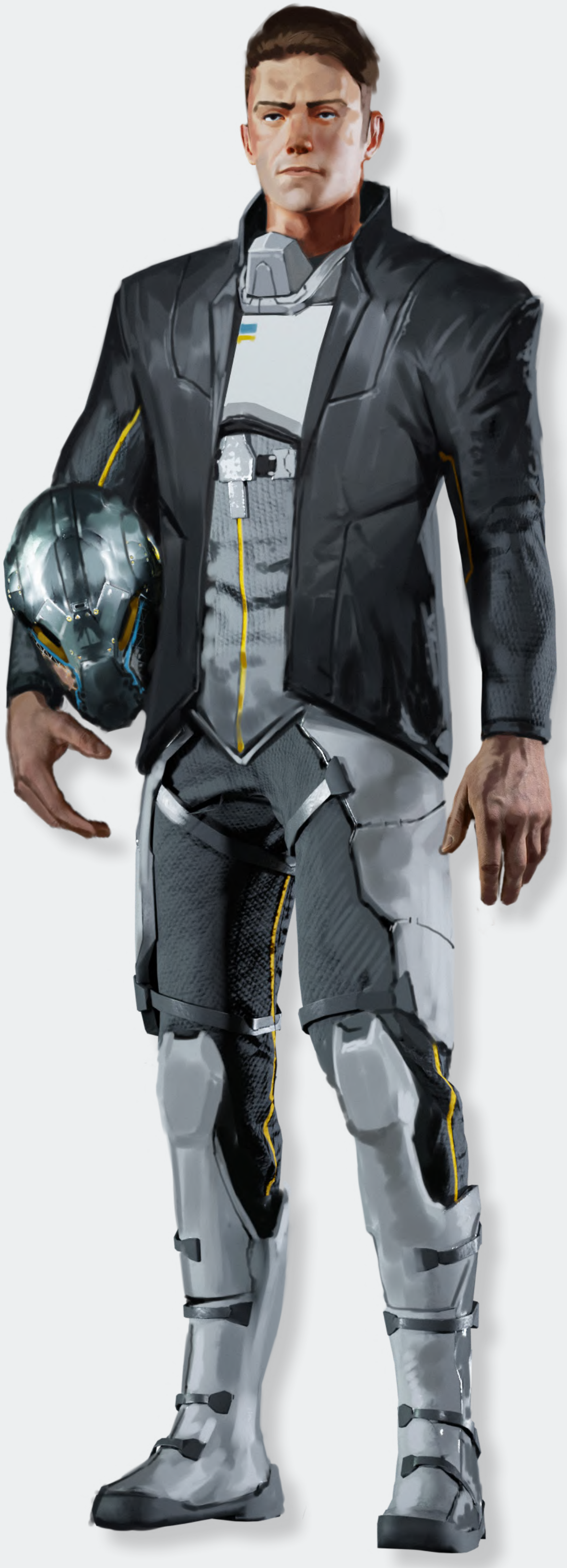
8
17
DECK 1
3
7
10
5
2
19
6

LEGEND

1. Docking space
2. Cargo hold
3. Biosphere
4. Kitchen
5. Common area
6. Sensors
7. Training facilities
8. Airlock
9. Stateroom
10. Pool
11. Studio
12. High stateroom
13. Medbay
14. Power plant
15. Jump drive
16. Manoeuvre drive
17. Low berths
18. Bridge
19. Armoury
20. Theatre



OMICRON DIVISION PERSONAL COMBAT EQUIPMENT

The personal combat kit is designed to fit over a combat environment suit but can be worn with coveralls or even just normal street clothes. It can be thrown on quickly in an emergency situation as the body protector has most of the equipment attached. This permits Omicron personnel to transition from a plain-clothes discreet posture to combat readiness in moments. Alternatively, taking the time to don the shoulder and neck protector before the jacket and to add the arm and leg guards brings an operative up to a high level of combat-readiness. If the neck protector is worn the helmet can seal to it, providing protection against gas hazards.

The suit's pockets contain a small medikit, flashlight and chemical lightsticks, a five metres length of strong cord with a slap-bond climbing or rope descent anchor, gloves, emergency filter mask and zip ties for securing captives. There are resizable pouches for six magazines and a clip point for a single hand grenade. Concussion types are favoured but other tactical or lethal grenades may be issued at need.

MID-DECK ENGINEERING

The main drive room is only occasionally visited by passengers but even so it is kept in a condition consistent with the ship's ostensible role. There is nothing to suggest the vessel has been modified in anything but a cosmetic manner. Everything is clean, tidy and in most cases polished to a gleaming finish. Two combat shotguns are kept on a bracket over the main engineering console, each loaded with six shells, with six more on a holder attached to the stock. In the event of serious trouble the crew would arm themselves with more potent weaponry from the armoury above but for minor situations it is desirable to preserve the 'classy liner' identity of the ship.

CREW AREA

The aft lounge is a crew space, accessed by way of iris valves which are usually set to allow only crewmembers to enter. This is common on vessels of this type, keeping passengers out of the way of crew who are trying to relax. If it seems necessary, this area will be placed at the disposal of the conference attendees at times but wherever possible the crew want to have a space of their own.

Armour Type	Protection	TL	Rad	Kg	Cost	Required Skill
Jacket	+6	15	0	4	Cr12500	None
Full Armour	+10	15	0	6	Cr15000	None

LOW BERTH CHAMBER

Glisten Pearl has retained her low berth capacity. The Travellers might not notice this but if they do it may strike them as odd. The vessel has been significantly upgraded to attract high-end passengers, so might be expected to do away with low berth capacity in favour of additional recreation space or cabins. In fact it suits the purposes of Omicron Division to retain the stasis facility, enabling captives or persons of interest to be transported with no chance of them causing trouble.

CREW CABINS

As is standard on most liners, the six ‘inner’ cabins are reserved for crew use. They are in their own section, the valves to which are normally set to crew-access only. This allows personnel to move between the bridge and engineering chamber – and also their quarters and recreation space – without encountering passengers. Each crewmember has the usual items that would be expected for their role aboard the vessel; tools, vacc suit, multiple changes of smart uniform and shipboard working dress. In addition, crewmembers have a small and rather dainty autopistol and a baton in their quarters. These are carried when trying to make passengers feel secure or dealing with a minor incident, and would be replaced by gauss pistols and laser carbines from the armoury if needed.

COMMAND SPACE

The ship’s command space consists of an elegant and well-furnished bridge and a small ship’s office. Passengers are shown the bridge on a frequent basis but are not granted general access. As with engineering, there are two combat shotguns on brackets for passengers to see. There is nothing about the bridge to suggest the vessel has an alternate role but anyone gaining access to the control systems will notice there are additional options such as stealth jump configuration and turret deployment. The weaponry can be deployed and ordered to operate under general instructions from the bridge using virtual gunner software but is normally directed from the gunnery chamber.

The ship’s office has a physically isolated computer for data storage and a safe for important documents. Both contain (physical and electronic) copies of the ship’s Imperial Warrant. This essentially states that the crew of *Glisten Pearl* are Imperial agents acting under the auspices of the Emperor himself and that any Imperial official must assist them to the utmost of their ability. The warrant does not apply to private citizens as such but does give the vessel’s commanding officer the right to take action against those who impede a mission. This can be interpreted very loosely as permitting the crew to take anything they need or force compliance at gunpoint.

PASSENGER CABINS

As built, *Glisten Pearl* had 12 cabins up each side but these have been gutted in pairs. The forwardmost pair on each side, normally associated with a spa or steam room, have been closed off with crew-access-only hatches. The official explanation is that these are now storage areas, which is partially true. Travellers who get a look inside will see an industrial quantity of bed linen plus cleaning robots and similar paraphernalia of life aboard a liner. Concealed behind this is a bank of electronic and sensor equipment, and the mountings for the turrets above and below.

The remaining 10 cabins on each side have been converted into the equivalent of a high stateroom plus a small private lounge/office area, with each one replacing a pair of cabins. The liner’s capacity is thus now 10 luxurious cabins, each with one or two occupants. All are fitted out to a very high standard, in differing styles. Some are opulent, others simpler but with extremely high-quality materials.

PASSENGER LOUNGE

The circular forward passenger area has been upgraded in terms of quality but remains more or less the same in function. The bar and galley areas are extremely well stocked with high-quality ingredients and the chamber in general is designed to be switched quickly from dining to lounge functions – or in this case becoming a conferencing suite.

CARGO DECK

The launch docking area has not been greatly altered but the ship’s cargo hold has received some alterations. The front half is now a multi-purpose recreation area, whilst the rear half is divided in two. One half remains as cargo space, whilst the other has become a set of small chambers which are currently set up for meetings of a handful of people. The partitions here are light and obviously intended to be reconfigured or removed as necessary.

CREW OF *GLISTEN PEARL*

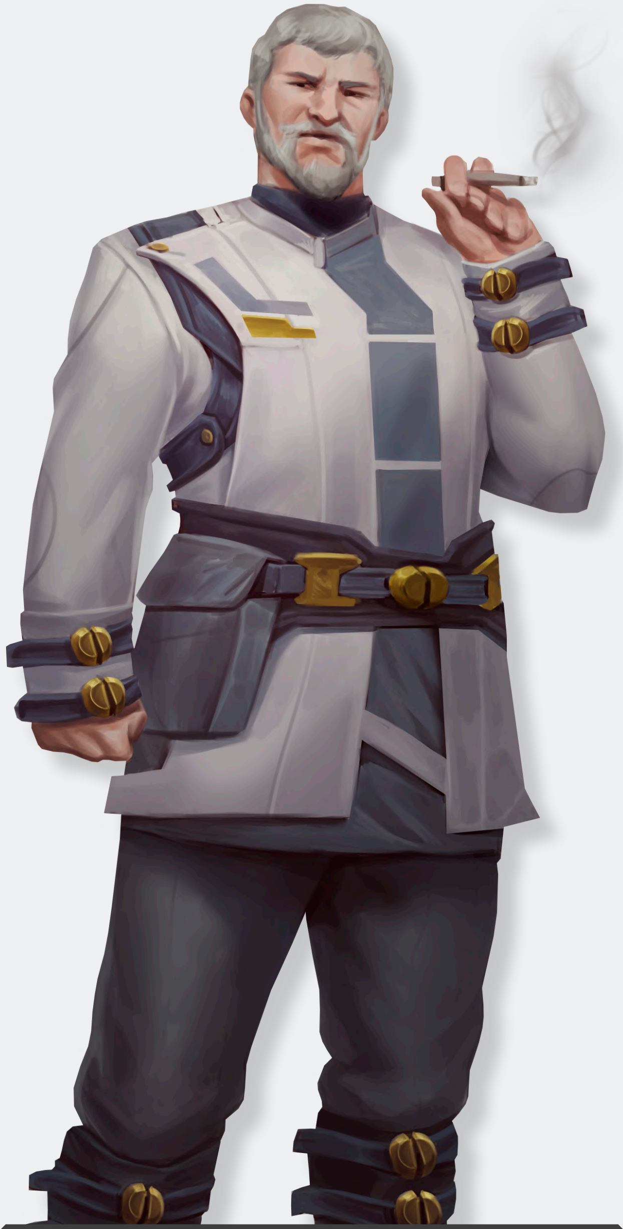
Glisten Pearl is operated by Omicron Division but most of her crew think they are freelance intelligence-gathering experts; they sometimes take on tasks unrelated to Omicron Division's remit in order to preserve this illusion and also because information may turn up in the least likely places. Many of these missions are on behalf of Imperial Naval Intelligence, which has the vessel listed as a freelance 'friendly asset'. Few members of the navy have any idea the ship is actually an Imperial asset.

The nominal crew for a Type M liner is four – pilot, astrogator and two engineers, plus stewards and medics as necessary. *Glisten Pearl* has a different structure due to its mission requirement. The crew is divided into two divisions known as 'ship' and 'deck'. Ship crew are primarily responsible for operating the vessel and, other than the captain, tend not to interact with passengers. Deck crew are ostensibly stewards and the like, although all have a mission-oriented role or serve as backups for the main crew.

MASTER STARFARER AEDHKO UEANG (CAPTAIN)

Officially, Master Starfarer Aedhko Ueang is a retired Imperial Navy lieutenant, whose career went as far as command of a small patrol ship not unlike the one the Travellers recently encountered. His story is a familiar one; he went so far in the navy on talent and hard work but lacked the connections to proceed to command of a warship. So, he signed on as the master of this liner when her owners needed someone in a hurry and has made sure they never came to regret it.

Most of this is true. Aedhko Ueang did serve 20 years in the navy and retired to take command of this vessel. However, his last few years of naval service were watched by Omicron Division, which arranged for him to be seconded to one of their mission teams. Satisfactory service resulted in command of the present team. Aedhko Ueang takes his mission very seriously but at the same time he is aware of just how 'out there' it is at times. He thinks Ancients Hunters are deluded idiots or dangerous amateurs who should not be fiddling with things they do not understand, yet will play the role of gracious liner captain all the same.



MASTER STARFARER AEDHKO UEANG (CAPTAIN)

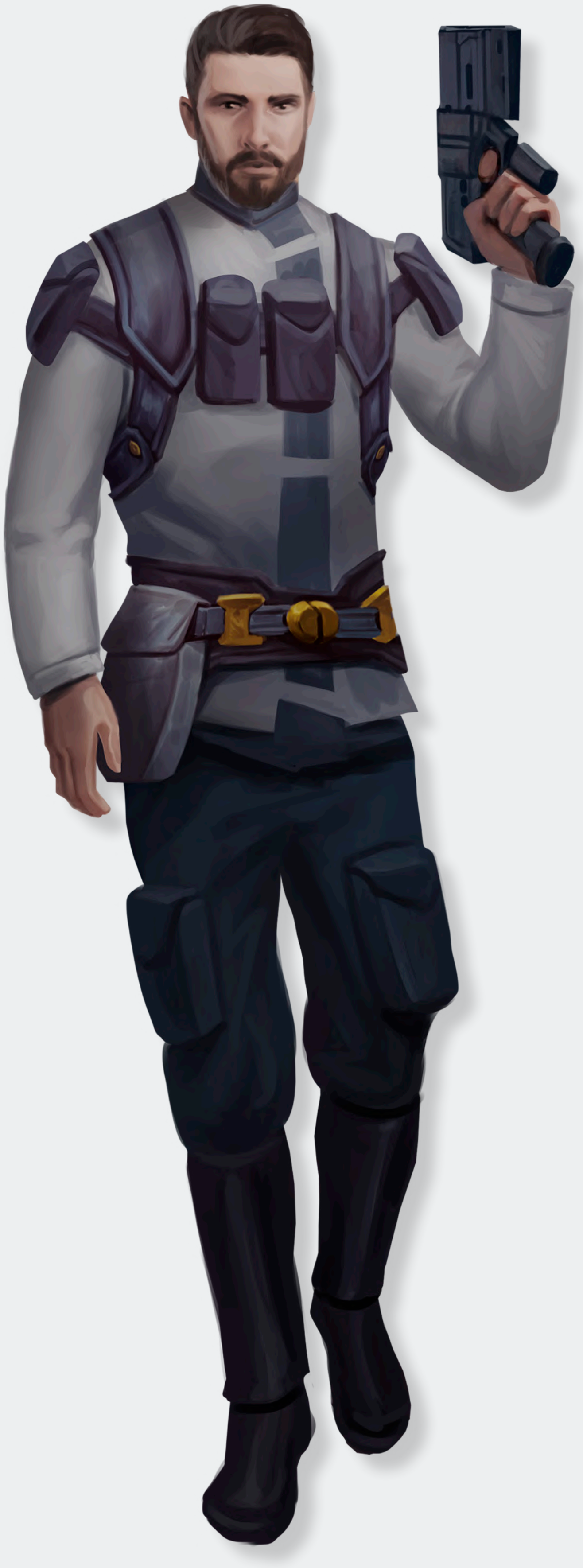
SPECIES	GENDER	AGE
—	Male	55

TRAITS			—	SKILLS
STR	4	INT	8	Admin 1, Astrogation 2, Diplomat 3, Electronics (sensors) 2, Gun Combat (slug) 1, Leadership 2, Tactics (naval) 2, Vacc Suit 1
DEX	9	EDU	9	
END	7	SOC	8	
WEAPONS:	Baton (2D), Snub Pistol (3D-3, Zero-G)			

SEPAND HAN (FIRST OFFICER)

Sepand Han is ostensibly the ship's purser as well as second-in-command. He is the member of the crew most likely to interact a lot with the Travellers and other passengers. His official backstory is 'career merchant line officer' but in fact Han has been an agent of Omicron Division since he was in college. He started out in ground-based roles – security, then intelligence – and moved to a shipboard deployment a few years ago after re-training. In combat, he functions as the ship's gunnery officer, although he is more at home kicking doors open in a groundside raid.

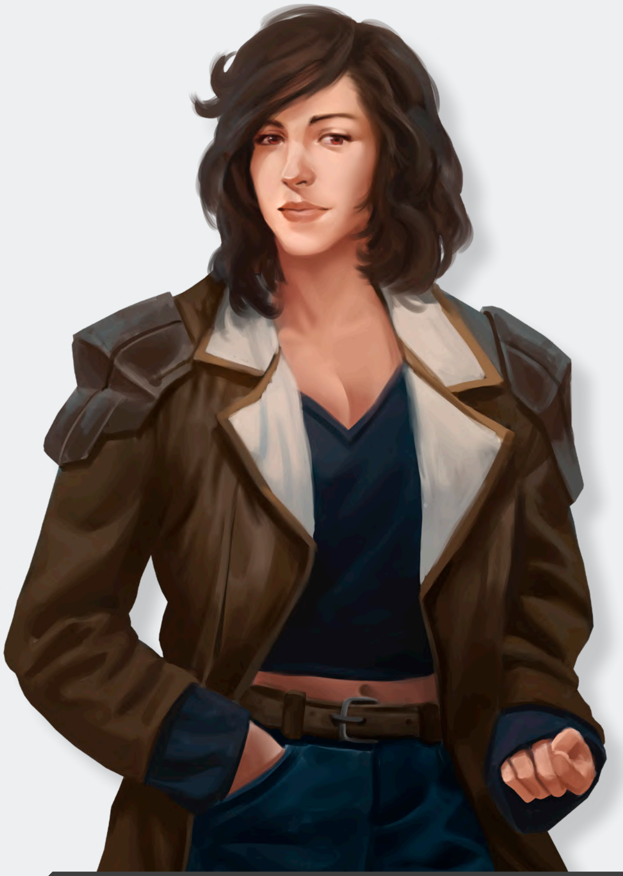
Han is also the ship's intelligence chief, a role he is well-versed in. He is equally adept at worming information out of passengers during a social interaction, or conducting a field interrogation by whatever means are necessary. Han is cold and ruthless but not cruel. In fact, like many Omicron personnel, he does not really believe in the 'Ancients mission'. It is enough for him that his superiors consider the potential threat to be worth countering. If he encounters proof they exist he will not be surprised but to him they are just one more distant possible threat. Tomorrow it could be Zhodani, or Solomani agitators, or a particularly virulent potato blight. Han seeks out threats and deals with them. He does not really care what the threat is, all that matters is that the threat is to the Imperium.



SEPAND HAN (FIRST OFFICER)

SPECIES	GENDER	AGE
—	Male	42

TRAITS			—	SKILLS
STR	8	**INT**	10	Admin 1, Diplomat 2, Gun Combat (slug) 1, Gunner (turret) 1, Investigate 3, Leadership 1, Melee (unarmed) 2, Steward 2, Vacc Suit 1
DEX	7	**EDU**	9	
END	9	**SOC**	7	
WEAPONS:	Gauss Pistol (3D, AP 3, Auto 2)			

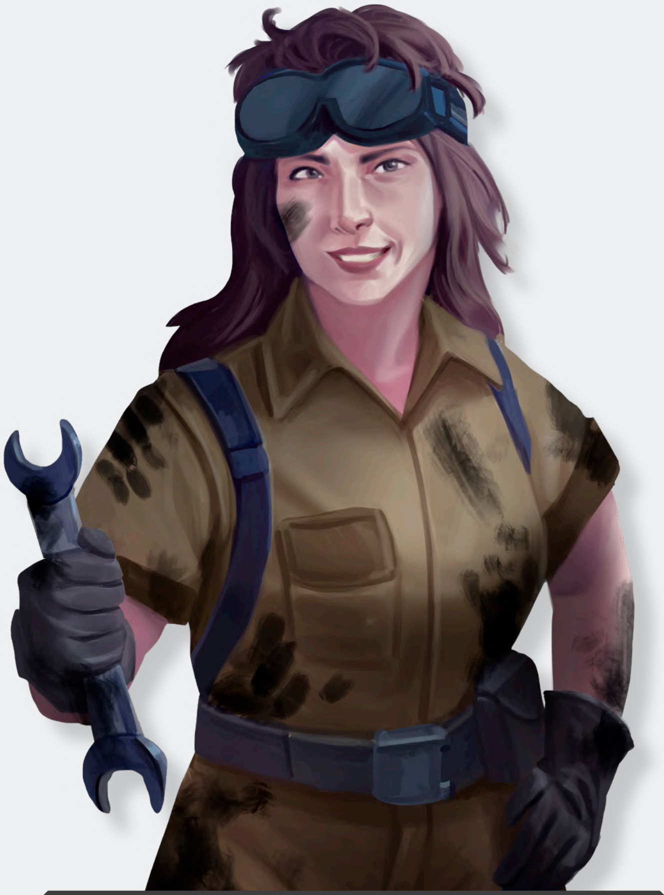


ELAINE GOSISSCH (CHIEF PILOT)

SPECIES	GENDER	AGE
—	Female	35

TRAITS			—	SKILLS
STR	8	INT	10	Astrogation 1, Gun Combat (slug) 1, Electronics (sensors) 2, Pilot (spacecraft) 4, Vacc Suit 1
DEX	7	EDU	9	
END	9	SOC	7	

WEAPONS:	Gauss Pistol (3D, AP 3, Auto 2)



KANSAMSHA KEREMEI (CHIEF ENGINEER)

SPECIES	GENDER	AGE
—	Female	30

TRAITS			—	SKILLS
STR	8	INT	10	Electronics (sensors) 2, Engineer (j-drive) 2, Engineer (power) 3, Gun Combat (slug) 1, Mechanic 1, Vacc Suit 1
DEX	7	EDU	9	
END	9	SOC	7	

WEAPONS:	Gauss Pistol (3D, AP 3, Auto 2)

ELAINE GOSISSCH (CHIEF PILOT)

Gosissch is rather antisocial for a liner crewmember but she is an excellent pilot. The Travellers may not even encounter her during the conference and if they do she will prefer to keep the meeting as short as possible. When there are passengers aboard she stays in the crew area as much as possible. Gosissch does not know anything about Omicron Division. She was hired to fly a liner so that the crew could make money doing freelance intelligence work; that is all she knows or cares to know.

KANSAMSHA KEREMEI (CHIEF ENGINEER)

Perhaps inevitably nicknamed ‘crankshaft’ by her crewmates, Kansamsha is not connected with Omicron Division. Like most of the crew she believes she is working for a freelance intelligence consultant. Not that it matters – she likes starships and is glad to be chief engineer aboard such a good one.

YACOL GIRKHAASHI (SECOND ENGINEER)

Yacol is even more anti-social than Elaine when it comes to interacting with passengers. He stays in the crew area if at all possible and resents any intrusion by nosy ‘self-importants’ who insist on a tour. He is a competent engineer who collects his salary in return for doing his job. The mission is not in any way important to him.

UGUISHE GAO (CHIEF STEWARD/MEDIC)

The Travellers are likely to interact with Uguishe a lot. She is a primary point of contact and is charged with keeping the passengers happy. Her ‘cover story’ is more or less completely true; she went to a mercantile college and qualified as a starship steward, then worked aboard a variety of small vessels. She omits the part where she developed an interest in the Ancients and accompanied some crewmates into a site where they removed dangerous artefacts. Uguishe was rescued by Omicron Division and now believes firmly that amateurs should not be allowed to mess with something so dangerous. She is not a zealot, and is quite capable of hiding her beliefs, but she holds Wannabee hunters in contempt and considers Players to be a real threat to the stability of the Imperium.

ILYA SANTOS (STEWARD/GUNNER)

Ilya does a competent job as steward but his primary role aboard the vessel is as gunner and security operative. He prefers the latter, getting hands-on when necessary. Ilya is capable of politely manhandling a difficult passenger, or clobbering a dangerous one. He has no hesitation in acting but can finely judge what is necessary.

AMKISH IGDAMKI (STEWARD/BACKUP PILOT/GUNNER)

Amkish has a similar role to Ilya but was recruited primarily for his gunnery skills. He is an adequate steward but functions best under close supervision. All liners have new hires and inexperienced crewmembers, so the fact that one of the stewards is not up to the standards of the others might not attract notice. Amkish does have a distinctly military bearing however and a habit of responding to commands like a soldier rather than a civilian steward.

YACOL GIRKHAASHI (SECOND ENGINEER)

SPECIES	GENDER	AGE
—	Male	38

TRAITS			—	SKILLS
STR	9	INT	8	Electronics (remote ops) 1, Engineer (life support) 1, Engineer (m-drive) 2, Gun Combat (slug) 1, Mechanic 2, Vacc Suit 1
DEX	6	EDU	10	
END	6	SOC	6	
WEAPONS:	Gauss Pistol (3D, AP 3, Auto 2)			

UGUISHE GAO (CHIEF STEWARD/MEDIC)

SPECIES	GENDER	AGE
—	Female	29

TRAITS			—	SKILLS
STR	5	INT	8	Advocate 1, Diplomat 2, Gun Combat (slug) 1, Medic 2, Steward 4, Vacc Suit 1
DEX	6	EDU	9	
END	5	SOC	8	
WEAPONS:	Gauss Pistol (3D, AP 3, Auto 2)			

ILYA SANTOS (STEWARD/GUNNER)

SPECIES	GENDER	AGE
—	Male	42

TRAITS			—	SKILLS
STR	11	INT	7	Diplomat 1, Gun Combat (slug) 2, Gunner (turret) 1, Medic 1, Melee (unarmed) 4, Steward 2, Vacc Suit 2
DEX	8	EDU	6	
END	10	SOC	7	
WEAPONS:	Gauss Pistol (3D, AP 3, Auto 2)			

ILYA SANTOS (STEWARD/GUNNER)

SPECIES	GENDER	AGE
—	Male	42

TRAITS			—	SKILLS
STR	11	INT	7	Diplomat 1, Gun Combat (slug) 2, Gunner (turret) 1, Medic 1, Melee (unarmed) 4, Steward 2, Vacc Suit 2
DEX	8	EDU	6	
END	10	SOC	7	
WEAPONS:	Gauss Pistol (3D, AP 3, Auto 2)			

CONFERENCE DELEGATES

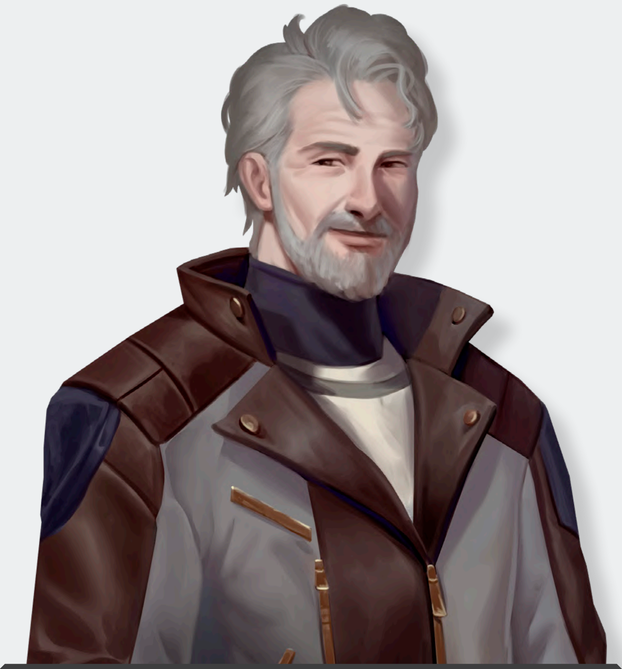
There are only four attendees at the conference, other than the Travellers. The Captain of Knowledge is disappointed but has naturally decided that his revelations are just too mind-blowing for some. Either they were scared to attend or their imagination was insufficient to encompass the enormity of what is about to be revealed. Three of the delegates are Wannabees like the Captain but one is of much greater interest.

VLEN BACKETT

Vlen Backett is known among the Ancients Hunter community as a genuine expert and something of a daredevil adventurer. There are many tales about his exploits and discoveries, and many hunters have tried to style themselves after him. In fact, most of this lore is as true as any other nonsense spouted by a Wannabee and has definitively been disproven by the authorities. They are certain that he is a shady artefacts trader who has built up a mystique to push up his prices. Several investigations have failed to prove any solid connection between the legends and the activities of Backett himself.

This suits Vlen Backett entirely. He operates in a vast cloud of obfuscation, secretive enough that those outside the Ancients Hunter community will never hear about him whilst those who take an interest face a barrage of rumours, innuendo and outright invention within which any truth is likely to be lost. Backett is polite, even to the most outrageously deluded Wannabee, and is happy for the Captain of Knowledge to congratulate himself on getting the great Vlen Backett to attend the conference. In fact, Backett does not care at all about the conference. He is here to meet the Travellers and find out what they know.

Backett is not at all what he seems. His significance in the grand scheme of things is revealed in *Secrets of the Ancients*. It is possible that he is a friend or relative of one of the Travellers – or someone who comes to be known as 'Uncle Vlen'. If this is the case, they may or may not have known Vlen was involved in the Ancients Hunter community. Whether this is a surprising twist to an existing relationship or a new acquaintance, Vlen will befriend the Travellers and appears to enjoy their company. He shares tall tales of his adventures, often beginning with 'I've heard that there was this one time I…' He admits there is some truth to some parts of some of these stories but it is impossible to tell when he is kidding and when he is telling the bizarre truth. He cannot be pinned down on anything, evading questions in a gently humorous manner or taking a sharp left turn into some other interesting but not relevant topic.

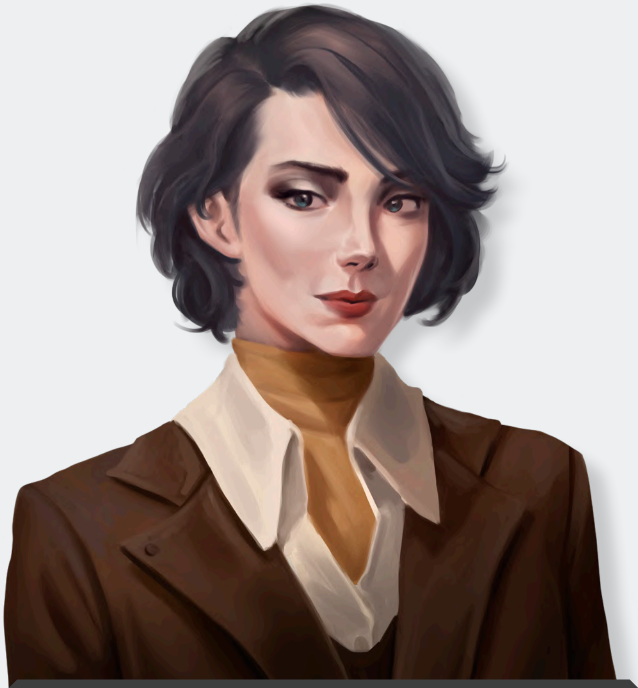


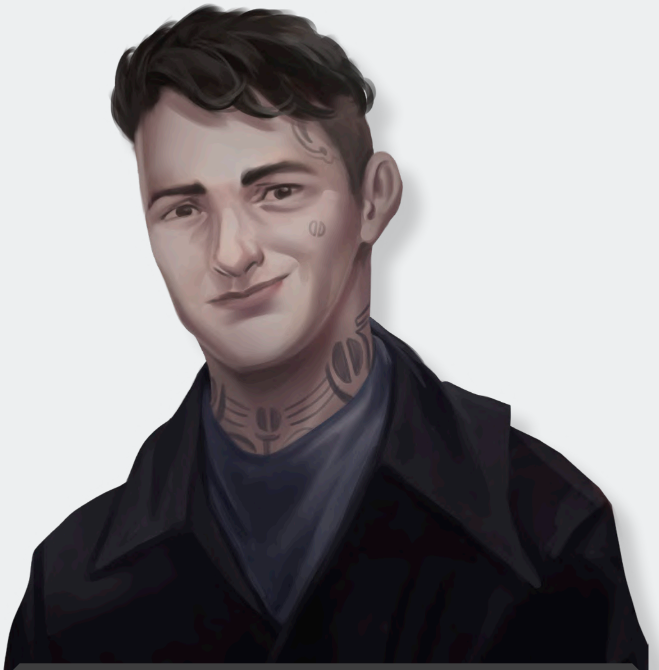
VLEN BACKETT

SPECIES	GENDER	AGE
Human	Male	52

TRAITS			—	SKILLS
STR	10	INT	10	Admin 1, Advocate 1, Astrogation 2, Broker 2, Carouse 2, Deception 3, Diplomat 2, Drive 0, Electronics (comms) 1, Electronics (computers) 3, Electronics (sensors) 2, Engineer (all) 3, Flyer (grav) 1, Gambler 2, Gun Combat (energy) 3, Investigate 2, Jack-of-all-Trades 2, Leadership 2, Mechanic 4, Medic 2, Navigation 1, Persuade 2, Pilot (spacecraft) 4, Stealth 4, Steward 2, Recon 3, Vacc Suit 2
DEX	12	EDU	14	
END	12	SOC	8	

Throughout the conference, Vlen is unassuming and polite. He does not say much about his own work and never contradicts anyone. If the Captain of Knowledge makes a blatantly made-up declaration and announces that 'Vlen will back me up on this one', Backett simply nods and says something like, 'I've heard about that, very interesting.' The Captain of Knowledge naturally concludes that the great Vlen Backett has confirmed his statement. It is obvious to everyone else that he has not really said anything at all.





VINCENTIA DASHLE

SPECIES	GENDER	AGE
Human	Female	40

TRAITS			—	SKILLS
STR	4	INT	6	Broker 2, Carouse 3, Investigate 1, Persuade 4
DEX	8	EDU	11	
END	5	SOC	8	

ARJUN NATHUSOU

SPECIES	GENDER	AGE
Human	Male	26

TRAITS			—	SKILLS
STR	7	INT	5	Drive (wheel) 1, Investigate 1, Profession (retail worker) 1
DEX	4	EDU	8	
END	7	SOC	5	

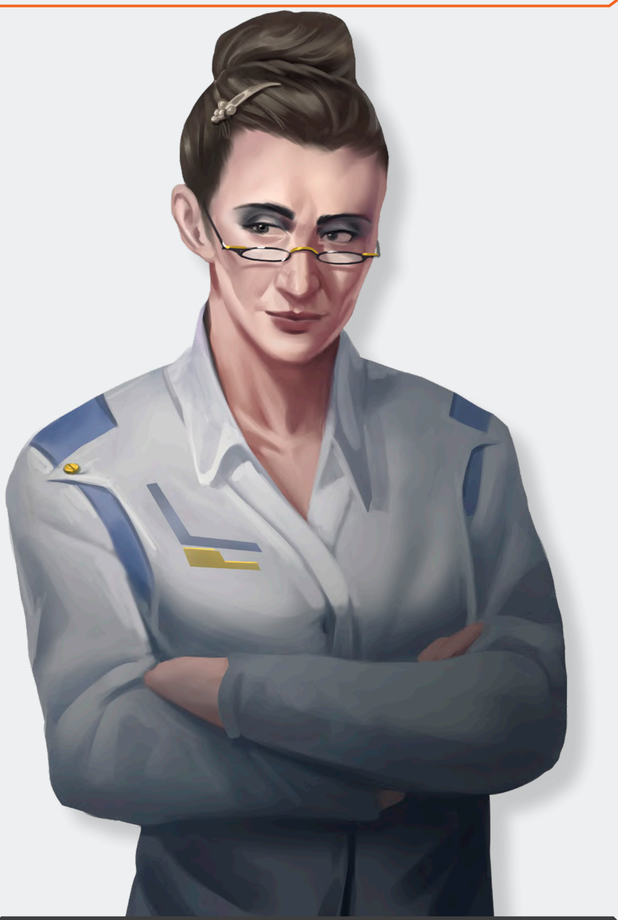
VINCENTIA DASHLE

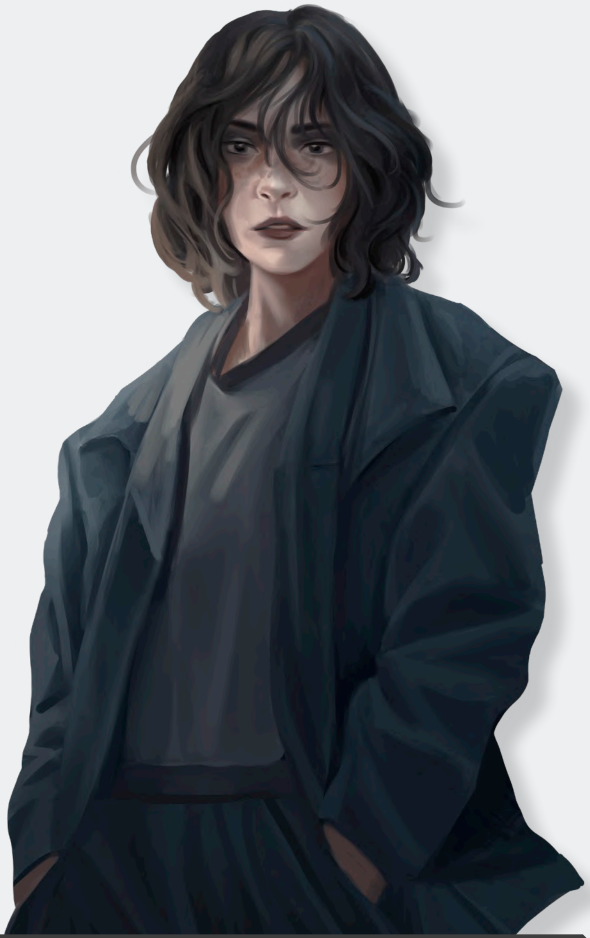
Vincentia is a typical Wannabee, keen to learn about everyone else's pet theories so she can demolish them in favour of her own. She claims there never were any Ancients as such, just a collection of species who became powerful then collapsed. The whole Ancients concept is a mistake, she says. It would be better to study these different species in isolation, rather than creating a hugely contrived, over-arching civilisation to explain every possible anomaly. Vincentia comes from a well-off background and is used to getting her own way. This makes her argumentative and difficult to reason with. She is the only delegate likely not to be impressed with the level of service from the liner's crew.

Vincentia's Persuade skill is more a measure of her ability to talk loudly over anyone else than anything to do with reason or logical argument.

ARJUN NATHUSOU

Arjun considers himself to be something of an adventurer, although his idea of an adventure is slipping away from a guided tour to have a closer look at something. He has visited a couple of the publicly-available Ancients sites and collected a few replica artefacts. Arjun has a rather charming puppy-dog enthusiasm about him which the Travellers might find irritating after a while. He works mundane jobs for years on end to save up enough for a visit somewhere, so being able to come to this convention for nothing is the experience of a lifetime for him. He has a limitless supply of hero-worship for anyone who will tolerate him. The Captain of Knowledge cannot get enough of that. If the Travellers will have him, Arjun will join their crew and be glad to run around doing little jobs in return for sharing their adventures… at least, until things get really dangerous.





JESSICA UUUMGI

SPECIES	GENDER	AGE
Human	Female	46

TRAITS			—	SKILLS
STR	5	INT	9	Admin 2, Investigate 2, Persuade 1, Science (history) 3
DEX	6	EDU	12	
END	7	SOC	8	

ZENHUA ALEXEI-KHUDA

SPECIES	GENDER	AGE
Human	Female	24

TRAITS			—	SKILLS
STR	8	INT	5	Flyer (grav) 1, Profession (ordinary job) 1
DEX	7	EDU	6	
END	4	SOC	6	

JESSICA UUUMGI

Jessica works in administration for the University of Glisten and is a pretty fair scholar, although most of what she knows is unconnected to the Ancients. She subscribes to the common view that the Ancients were a coalition, a culture rather than a species. She is also sure that the remnants of the Ancients culture include some species alive today. This makes her receptive to the idea that perhaps the Ancients were humans, or that some ancient humans were Ancients. Jessica can split this particular hair down to the microscopic level if given the chance but she is willing to listen to other viewpoints.

ZENHUA ALEXEI-KHUDA

Zenhua is not really an Ancients Hunter as such. Instead she is a fan of Ancients Hunters. She will devour any crumbs of knowledge and parrot them back in the hope of winning favour with her latest heroes. The star of the show, at the time she arrives, is of course the Captain of Knowledge himself. However, Zenhua might transfer her favour to someone else if suitably impressed, or if offended by her current favourite. She subscribes wholeheartedly to the last theory she heard or the one put forward by the most impressive hunter.

COMING ABOARD

The liner is in orbit around Aki and will send its launch for the Travellers as soon as they are ready. It will be piloted by Amkish, with Uguishe aboard to greet the Travellers. They are the last to arrive and everyone is anxious to begin the conference. Uguishe tells the Travellers that a proper reception has been set up aboard the liner and that questions will be answered in due course. In the meantime there are drinks and snacks available during the short journey. These are not ordinary small craft vending machine fare; there is wine, cheese and fruit, cold meats and meat-equivalents, and excellent fresh bread to go with it.

The trip is short and efficient, apart from a slightly circuitous approach which lets the Travellers get a look at the liner. It is shiny and clean, with no signs of modification or damage. After circling the parent vessel the launch slides into its berth and the Travellers are directed to disembark. The liner's chief steward and commanding officer will show the Travellers to their accommodation and suggest they take time to change if they want to. A drinks reception is waiting in the main passenger lounge, where introductions will be made.

When the Travellers arrive, everyone else is already there. The stewards unobtrusively make sure everyone has something to drink and more snacks if they want. The quality of food and drink is high but that does not mean it is to everyone's taste. The stewards will try to guide the Travellers towards what they like. It is an essential part of their training that they learn to determine what sort of person likes or dislikes certain foods and drinks. The Travellers may note that the stewards are providing guidance to all delegates except Vlen, who seems to be very well versed in wine and similar drinks.

Similarly, impressions can be gained from the dress of the delegates and how they wear it. There was no dress code mentioned but it would normally be assumed that some degree of formality might be desirable. The Captain of Knowledge has made sure he is the centre of attention and to be noticed first. He is wearing an expensive and exquisitely tailored dinner suit… but it looks like a sack on him; he is simply not someone who knows how to bear himself or to wear formal dress without somehow making it look scruffy. Vincente, on the other hand, came in formal dress and wears it with an air of casual elegance, as if she just grabbed something from the wardrobe and it happened to be fabulous. She comes from a background where this is a necessary social skill.

Vlen and Jessica are more business-casual, well-dressed without overdoing it. Arjun and Zenhua presumably have no experience of conferences and liners so just dress how they please. The Travellers might be able to gain a first impression of the delegates' background from their clothing and how baffled they seem by the choice of beverages and snacks on offer. Travellers with the Carouse skill will be able to navigate this complex maze of flavours on their own and attract the attention of Vincente as 'people worth talking to'. Others will have to rely on the stewards.

Picking the wrong wine to go with a selection of vol-au-vents is not a disaster in the grand scheme of things but there are social cues to be picked up on. Once everyone has what they want, the Captain of Knowledge formally opens the proceedings. He has no training or expertise in running a conference but is extremely self-important. So long as everything is about him and his ego, it will go well.

The Captain of Knowledge steps up to the podium at the fore end of the lounge and starts talking into the microphone. Normally there would be a call for order or silence but he knows nothing about what he is doing. Likewise, his speech is long, rambling and at times confusing; it will suffice to present a few salient points.

He introduces himself in the manner of something between prize-winning scientist and rock star, mentioning exactly how many datacasts he has made, which prominent Ancients Hunters have come to his museum, which theories he has 'authored' or 'proved', how many people come to his museum every year, some random snippets Bernadatta Khaled said one time, a weirdly precise number of people who have asked him to explain his theories and how many of them (almost all, naturally) have been converted… it goes on like this for a while. The Captain of Knowledge cannot say 'a great deal of data' if it is possible to enumerate exactly how many files, of what length and how well they were received by eminent people. There are those who cannot help this sort of behaviour due to their mental state but it appears that the Captain simply likes to make sure everyone knows exactly how important he is… down to the last 2,344-word appendix.

Finally, the Captain of Knowledge gets around to welcoming everyone to his conference. The Travellers may note that he does not thank anyone for coming. He explains that the liner is going to tour the system over the next few days, giving spectacular views of the gas giant ring systems. Along the way there will be time to discuss important matters and share information, and in a few days' he will make his big revelation. It will, of course, blow everyone's minds.

THE CONFERENCE BEGINS

Once the Captain has finally finished telling everyone how great he is, the conference can begin. He has not really given much thought to how to proceed, other than giving everyone a few days to anticipate the big reveal. He absolutely will not discuss this before he is ready – this is the moment of a lifetime and he is milking it for all it is worth. In the meantime, the delegates are encouraged to talk to one another and ask any questions – about anything but the big reveal – they want. Again, this is about the Captain dispensing his wisdom.

Everyone else has already met and had some discussions, so the Travellers will be the focus most of the time. The Captain is not completely happy about that and will butt into conversations and try to divert them to his preference. He naturally wants to tell the Travellers all about everything and to be seen in their company. If they split up they will be able to talk to the other delegates in peace so long as at least one of their number keeps the Captain busy.

The Travellers have a couple of days to interact with the other delegates and might grow fond of some of them. Others, particularly Vincente, are likely to annoy the Travellers. There is plenty of time, so after the initial frenzy of questions and diatribes dies down the conference – if it can really be called that – proceeds at a modest pace. The liner operates on a standard day/night cycle but not everyone is adjusted to it. As a result, some of the delegates might be up and about at odd times, or arrive at an impromptu party just as everyone is leaving.

The Delegates table gives a general indication of the character of the delegates. The Travellers might have multiple interactions with each. Not all are significant to the campaign but the Travellers might still learn something useful.

A PRESENTATION BY JESSICA

At some point, Jessica will schedule a presentation and invite everyone to attend. If anyone actually does, she begins a pretty good 40-minute lecture on known starfaring civilisations of the past 500,000 years. This is peripheral to the Ancients subject but it is quite interesting. Jessica suggests that some of these species formed a coalition which is today considered to be the Ancients. She is sure the Droyne and Vargr were part of this coalition, although whether this was all of them or just factions she cannot say. Jessica also mentions that there were starfaring humans as far back as 250,000 years ago – at least – but again it is not clear whether humans were part of the coalition.

Delegates

Delegate	Personality	Stance
The Captain of Knowledge	Bombastic, Self-important	I know more about the Ancients than everyone else. You came to my convention to hear my revelations. Now listen…
Vlen Backett	Unassuming, Polite	I'm here to drink fine wine and hear some interesting ideas.
Vincentia Dashle	Arrogant, Pushy	You can't see the trees for the forest you're imagining! There *WERE* no Ancients, just a lot of impressive civilisations.
Arjun Nathusou	Enthusiastic, Clingy	Tell Me Everything! Tell Me More!
Jessica Uuumgi	Scholarly, Interested	The Ancients were a coalition of species forming a distinct culture. Exactly which species is an open question.
Zenhua Alexei-Khuda	Hero-worshipping, Fickle	Whatever the Captain of Knowledge is saying, unless she changes allegiance.

At this point the Captain of Knowledge starts arguing with Jessica, since he ‘knows’ that the Ancients were humans from Earth and therefore she is clearly wrong. Jessica is upset by this – questions are one thing but shouting down a lecture and declaring the lecturer ‘clueless’ is a breach of an academic etiquette she thought everyone subscribed to. The Travellers may be able to deflect the Captain and let Jessica finish, which will win her respect and gratitude. If not, the lecture dissolves into an argument in which the Captain is determined to have the last word.

This incident may alter the relationship between the Travellers and the others. If they challenge the Captain directly he will become hostile, although as noted elsewhere there is no chance for him to become physically violent. Instead he will be rude and confrontational, pooh-poohing the Travellers’ knowledge, and will try to lecture them on how they are wrong. If they are more subtle he might not realise he has been derailed. He will still make a counter-lecture later, in which he repeatedly states that ‘some people think that…’ before rebutting Jessica’s statements. This is all very petty and passive-aggressive but it has worked for the Captain in the past. After all, he is hosting this huge interstellar conference aboard a classy liner. He must be doing something right.

If the Travellers become friendly with Jessica they will find she has a lot of academic contacts at the University of Glisten and is a genuine scholar despite not being part of the academic faculty. Whilst a Wannabee as far as the Ancients are concerned, Jessica has a lot of solid knowledge. If she survives the events of the next few days she could become a useful Contact for the Travellers. She would be reluctant to join their crew but might come along for a specific purpose.

A CHAT WITH VLEN

Vlen Backett stays in the background and listens, asking just enough questions to seem interested. He gives no indication if he disagrees with anyone, even if he knows for a fact they are just making stuff up, and he is in no hurry but will want to talk with the Travellers. If they can be induced to tell their tales and boast of their adventures, this suits Vlen’s purpose. If not, he will trade information. Vlen knows a very great deal about many things, as will become apparent in *Secrets of the Ancients*, but he has his reasons for concealing both what he knows and how much.

Vlen's Snippets

Topic	Basic Information	Additional Information
Bernadatta Khaled	Vlen says he met her a couple of times and she seemed very knowledgeable. He even got a lift on her ship one time when they were both going to visit Blanca. Yes, he knows Blanca and thinks highly of her but he has not seen her in years.	Vlen does not know Bernadatta is dead. Whilst he did not know her well he did respect her and is sorry to hear about her demise.
Blanca	Blanca is a genuine Ancients expert. Vlen visited her a few times at her home but does not want say where that is.	Since the Travellers already know, Vlen concedes that Blanca was on Callia and had been for some time.
The *Garnette*	Bernadatta's ship. Well-known in the Hunter community and probably worth a fortune for the name alone.	That ship has a mysterious past. It was clearly rebuilt after heavy damage and given a new registry. Odd that there are no records of its previous service.
The Captain of Knowledge	He is very… prominent… in the Ancients Hunter community. Nice conference he's put together.	Vlen will not say anything bad about the Captain but he is faint in his praise.
The Other Delegates	Some interesting ideas there. I'd like to take a look at the research behind them.	Again, nothing bad but Vlen's statement could be taken various ways. He is not endorsing nor contradicting anyone.
The Ancients	Yes, well. Big subject, that. Lots of different opinions making for an interesting debate.	Vlen will agree that the Ancients definitely existed, at least as a concept. It is hard to say if they were one species, a faction within one species, or a culture made up of various species.
Vlen's Interest in the Ancients	Always been interested in everything. Formation of the universe, evolution, how we got here today. Is there someone with a plan or are we on our own?	Vlen does not have much more to add but is very interested in what the Travellers think, especially if they suggest that events are being guided by some remnant of the Ancients. The reason for this is revealed in *Secrets of the Ancients*. For now, Vlen will try to find out if the Travellers would be opponents of 'someone with a plan' or might become servants.
Who Were the Ancients?	One of the Major Races, most likely. Almost certainly not the K'kree or the Hivers.	It is probably better to think of the Ancients as a culture than a specific species. Maybe not all members of a given species were 'Ancients' as we think of them.
What Happened to the Ancients?	Well, there's no sign they're around anymore. Lots of people think they had a civil war or something. There's evidence of pretty widespread conflict a few hundred thousand years ago.	You'd expect there to be survivors from even a huge war. Maybe not all the Ancients were wiped out. Some could have degenerated rather than being destroyed. Or some might have survived somehow. What would we do about that? This is another occasion upon which Vlen is sounding out the Travellers. Their answer may be important later.
Have You Been to an Ancients Site?	Yes. Okay, that was a bit cryptic. I've visited a few and not all of them were the museum ones. Mostly they're cleared out but you can find the odd artefact here and there. Most are harmless. Some… aren't.	Been to Amritsar in Deneb for one. It's an archaeological site, off-limits unless you can get a pass or use… other means... Sufren in Diaspora is similar. Batan in the Trojan Reach is really exciting to get to, what with the lethal atmosphere and all. And then it's really disappointing…
G482	Not heard of that one. Heh, or maybe I have and I don't remember. Tell me more…	Vlen does not know anything about G482 but he recognises it as something the Ancients might create. He will not reveal this, however.

Vlen prefers not to lie to anyone – although he is perfectly willing to do so at need – so will tell little bits of the truth in a disjointed manner. The result is designed to obfuscate as much as it reveals but it does permit trust to be built if Vlen later decides someone is worth working with. He will try to casually set up an exchange of information, telling the Travellers something then waiting for something in reply. If he is not satisfied with what he gets, he steers the conversation in the direction of innocuous chitchat. He is not especially subtle about this, which may enable the Travellers to realise what he is doing and strike an unspoken bargain.

Vlen will not make untruthful claims but is quite willing to say something like, ‘there are several well-respected members of the Ancients Hunting community who say that…’ and then repeat somebody else’s nonsense. His own thoughts are stated as facts, although commonly they are facts wrapped in a blanket of vagueness.

These are summarised in the Vlen’s Snippets table. The additional information can be obtained by either roleplaying the conversation or if Vlen thinks the Travellers might need to know. The latter is unlikely but if the Travellers ask the right questions – or the Referee needs to ensure they have the information – they may be rewarded. Note that the table indicates what Vlen might tell the Travellers and it is not untrue. However, it may not be the whole story.

Vlen could tell the Travellers a lot about the Ancients but he will not at this time. He deals in innuendo and snippets of information, doling out a little and seeing who does what with it. Mostly nothing happens; indeed, some Wannabees will flat-out tell him he is wrong. Now and then, however, he spots someone who might be of interest. He will not act immediately but will watch the Travellers until he senses they might be useful.

OTHER DELEGATES

The Travellers will have plenty of time to interact with the other delegates, although in some cases they may prefer to keep their distance. These interactions might take place over dinner, in the exercise room or anywhere else the Travellers might bump into someone. They may make a friend or two here, or even pick up additional crewmembers. Arjun would be willing to tag along on a big adventure and possibly some of the others. However, these are Wannabees who are used to a safe life. They will soon tire of danger or hardship and begin campaigning for a return to civilisation. Conferences aboard expensive liners are very nice but the reality of Ancients hunting is not for these people.

REVELATIONS!

As *Glisten Pearl* slides into orbit around the gas giant Aki 7, passengers are invited to the main lounge for the Captain of Knowledge’s great revelation. He naturally keeps everyone waiting a few minutes before marching self-importantly to the podium. With a grand gesture he appears to command the viewport shutters to slide open – although this was prearranged with the crew – and declares loudly, ‘Behold!’. The captain then says absolutely nothing for about 10 minutes whilst everyone drinks in the stunning view of the gas giant’s ring system. Or maybe they shuffle impatiently, bored of looking at space rocks, whilst the Captain keeps them waiting just a bit longer. This is the finest moment of his life and he is making the most of it. The Travellers might pity him – this is all he will ever be – or they might sympathise, or be annoyed. He does not notice any of it.

Finally, the Captain of Knowledge speaks. ‘A wonder of the cosmos,’ he begins, ‘laid out before us. Yet it is nothing to what I have to tell you. The time has come.’ After pausing to let this (in his mind at least) stunning statement sink in, the Captain finally begins. Long ago, he says, there was a crew of brave spacefarers who were cruelly ambushed and downed on a hostile planet. They survived only by making their way across the surface to a ruined Ancients site and unlocking its technologies.

As the Captain of Knowledge rambles on, the Travellers might realise he is describing the plot of *Twilight’s Peak*. Someone groans quietly. Vlen grins, amused, then schools himself to look attentive. Yes, declares the Captain of Knowledge, others have sought to decipher that cryptic tome. But only he has discerned its secrets! And WHAT SECRETS THEY AAAARE!!!

The last is a triumphant bellow. After a suitably long pause, the Captain of Knowledge begins again in a more normal tone. The key, he says, was a certain phrase within the text. An obscure reference, easy to miss or to interpret in a misleading manner. Once he understood its meaning, all else became clear. The Captain of Knowledge knows where there is a functioning Ancients site! The crew of *Glisten Pearl* are willing to take him there! Riches and glory await those willing to follow their Captain!

In response to questions about where this place is – and also what happens to those who do not want to make the journey, or indeed any other questions – the Captain of Knowledge launches into a rambling exposition of how a contact brought him a bundle of papers; real, actual handwritten papers. Some were apparently just nonsense, or fragments of calculations, cryptic notes and the like. Among them was a section written in actual sentences, although it was difficult to follow. Realising he recognised some of the references, the Captain of Knowledge compared them to the text of an old story and thereby unlocked a century-old mystery.

As he speaks, the liner's holo-projector displays handwritten words floating in the air around the Captain of Knowledge. He draws obscure connections, compares phrases to others or to the pattern of symbols in equations he clearly does not understand. As he speaks, the words change from handwriting to stark, simple text like that used on any data terminal. There is a lot of it; places, times, numbers, names. It is all too much to take in at once – and in any case it is pretty much nonsense – but one thing draws the Travellers' attention. A single phrase, scribbled in oddly familiar handwriting. 'There Lies, All Lies, Blatant Lies. A Deceitful Mountain in Shadow and Light.' The Travellers have seen that writing before, on the pages of the supposedly original manuscript of *Twilight's Peak*.

The Captain of Knowledge continues to pull meanings out of the full text of *Twilight's Peak*. His logic is tortuous and riddled with holes but the 'revelations' keep coming. Not all of them match with the shortened version of the text the Travellers might have produced but they can be found in the full version. He believes that the *Gyro Cadiz* task force really existed, although the names have been changed in the text. He is not concerned with the cargo or the betrayal, only the part where the crew found something strange. The 'wolves', according to the Captain of Knowledge, were Vargr raiders, known to be operating in the region the task force passed through at that time. Some were allied to the Outworld Coalition, some just seeking booty. Their agents infiltrated the convoy and betrayed its route. The ambush drove *Gyro Cadiz* down, forcing the crew to seek shelter…

The Captain of Knowledge is cut off by the ship's intercom 'urgent' signal. His shriek of rage almost drowns out the announcement that follows … but not quite.

'All passengers and crew. Do not be alarmed. We are about to be boarded by personnel from an Imperial Navy vessel. You are in no danger. Please cooperate fully. I repeat, you are in no danger.'

OMICRON DIVISION

Travellers with access to viewports can get a look at the vessels outside and they are likely to be impressed. Alarmed too, perhaps. Sliding across the liner's bow is a light cruiser-sized vessel, with lines similar to a Gionetti class. It is, however, somehow sleeker and more deadly looking, with bulges for unfamiliar weapons. A second ship in the same class, maybe a light carrier, stands off a little. There are also at least five destroyer-sized vessels. All are reminiscent of Imperial designs but seem… better somehow.

A faint tremor suggests that docking has been achieved and soon afterward the liner's commanding officer activates the internal comms once again. 'All passengers, please accept our apologies for the interruption. A customs and spaceworthiness boarding is now in progress. All passengers will be subject to routine questioning. Do not be alarmed; you are in no danger.'

Boardings of this sort are not uncommon – the Travellers have already been through one. However, this is no patrol corvette of the subsector fleet. These ships look more like something the Imperial Bodyguard Squadron would have… or maybe want. The crew will not stop the Travellers if they try to run or hide but will tell the personnel boarding the liner where everyone is. If the Travellers resist, they will be met with overwhelming force. Omicron Division does not hesitate when its personnel are threatened. However, if the Travellers cooperate they really do have nothing to fear.

The Travellers will not know this at the time but the boarding is pre-arranged. The liner's launch vacated the docking area and a naval shuttle landed. It carried a team of heavily armed security personnel and after depositing them, pulled back to allow another shuttle in. This one carried more security personnel and intelligence personnel. The security personnel conduct an efficient sweep-and-clear up the passenger corridors. Astute Travellers might notice they do not seem concerned about the crew and are not searching the crew areas. Nor do they have any trouble figuring out where someone is hiding.

COOPERATE OR MAKE A SCENE

The liner's crew are very much in evidence, reassuring everyone and trying to avoid escalation. Most delegates seem baffled and a bit nervous, probably because 'Ancients stuff' is considered questionable by the authorities so there is a slight fear of getting into trouble. There are two exceptions. One is Vlen, who rolls his eyes and declares 'Omicron Division. They don't exist you know….' The other is the Captain of Knowledge. As a team of combat-armoured security personnel with laser carbines stomp into the lounge, the Captain is in full flow. He demands to see an officer, a warrant, a noble… and some other things besides. An officer presents herself and spends 20 minutes trying to get a word in edgeways as the Captain of Knowledge pontificates. She is as patient as concrete and as yielding. When he eventually winds down she tells him what everyone else has already been told.

There are several officers among the boarding party. Each of the delegates at the conference will be required to answer 'some routine questions' posed by one of them. If desired, a crewmember will sit in with the questionee but they must otherwise be isolated. Nobody is under arrest and nobody is in danger unless they assault the boarding team. That, everyone is told, would be inadvisable. The assigned officer will answer questions during the interview.

REFEREEING THE INTERVIEW

The interview is conducted professionally, with a weird mix of implicit but understated threat and polite courtesy. If there are only a few Travellers, the Referee might play out the whole interview for each but for larger groups it is better to have one Traveller answer each question in turn, with the option for another to offer a different answer if they dislike or do not agree with the first. Omicron Division is not conducting a criminal investigation here. They are digging for information among people who most likely know nothing of any consequence and have dealt with countless deluded idiots in the past.

Omicron Status

Status	Criteria
Irrelevant	Most people are simply Irrelevant to the work of Omicron Division. The Travellers are unlikely to be awarded this status, given their present company, but might somehow convince the investigators that they are just crewmembers, bag-carriers or similar uninvolved persons.
Worthless	Wannabee Ancients Hunters and minor Players are considered Worthless by Omicron Division. They are on the radar and might be tracked as a matter of routine but have no value and are assumed to know nothing of importance.
Potential Asset	Those who demonstrate some knowledge or real connection with the Ancients (or another potential threat that might be worth investigating) and seem amenable to working with or even joining the Division are judged to be a Potential Asset. They will be given additional information and watched to see what they do.
Potential Threat	Those with some knowledge but who seem less than amenable to working with Omicron Division will be labelled Potential Threats. They will be watched more closely than the usual Wannabees but no interference will be made at this time.
Threat	Anyone who seems to be a real danger is labelled as such. The bar is high but someone who threatens to reveal secrets about the Ancients to the general public – and who seems to know something potentially damaging – will be labelled as a Threat.

If the Travellers try to resist they will be facing several personnel in combat armour, who will try to use less-lethal tactics if possible. Resisting makes the Traveller a wanted criminal, which could have complications. Hiding does not, although it looks rather suspicious and will do no good. The crew will simply tell the boarders where the Traveller is. After that attempts will be made to talk the Traveller out rather than to come in and get them, but the interview is going ahead whatever the Travellers do. Omicron Division is like that.

AN INTERVIEW WITH OMICRON DIVISION

Each Traveller will be interviewed separately, by an officer who sits facing them across a desk or table. Another officer sits nearby, wearing an ornate hood that must surely be a psionic shield. Neither is armed but there are guards nearby. The officers are polite and respectful if the Traveller is compliant, and coldly polite if they are not. All personnel wear uniforms reminiscent of those used by the Imperial Navy but with different insignia. Officers wear a combination of whole and hollow discs, in two sizes, to denote their status. The disc is similar to the insignia of Imperial Naval Intelligence and if anyone makes the connection the Omicron officers are quite willing to let them believe it.

Oddly enough, the interview begins with an explanation. The Travellers are informed that their vessel has been targeted for an investigative intelligence operation. As they probably suspect by now this is not a routine spaceworthiness inspection. There may even by a wry smile at that; the Omicron officers do not project threat, although they do make it clear that cooperation is mandatory and that anyone who does not answer their questions will be arrested. The officer then pauses and asks if the Travellers have any questions. This is a rather odd way to proceed and anyone who has had interactions with law enforcement or intelligence personnel will realise it.

Answers to likely questions are listed on the Omicron Responses table. Basic information will be given in response to a request. Additional information will only be divulged if the Traveller meets certain criteria. These are complex but the investigative officers are empowered to make a judgement call. They will categorise individuals and act towards them accordingly, as shown on the Omicron Status table. Those who are Potential Assets will be given the additional information. Everyone else gets the basics or an evasive reply.

The interviewers will ask open-ended questions for the most part and encourage the Travellers to talk freely. They are also willing to answer questions.

Potential Assets are essentially 'let in on the secret' that Omicron Division exists and knows all about the Ancients. For some, the lure of what they might learn will be irresistible. Omicron Division uses this to obtain intelligence assets within the Ancients Hunter community, as it likes to keep tabs on theories flying around. Occasionally these assets lead to something useful, enabling the Division to shut down or co-opt those with a penchant for getting into Ancients sites.

Being co-opted is much less common but the organisation does employ freelancers for some operations. Indeed, some of the artefact dealers and those who bring them artefacts are run by Omicron Division. It is considered better to have some activity and monitor it than to shut down everything they know about and lose sources of information. Many Omicron personnel weary of dealing with amateur Ancients Hunters but it is a necessary evil. Some are actually former Wannabees or even Players who have been invited to join the organisation.

Potential Assets will be provided with a datanet drop code. Using this will discreetly plant a message which will be picked up by Omicron personnel. Contact will follow. The Travellers are told they can use this to provide information, for which they will be rewarded in due course, or to ask for help. They are reminded that they are operating in a very dangerous world and that someday they might need a high-tech cruiser to pull their fat out of the fire.

Potential Threats will not be arrested but will be monitored. It is possible that a potential threat might be brought round to becoming an asset, or they might lead Omicron Division to a bigger fish. Only in a situation where someone is an obvious and immediate threat would they be detained. Those who pose an Ancients-related threat will be kept by Omicron Division in complete violation of their rights. Anyone who does not, but broke laws during the boarding, will be handed over to the Ministry of Justice.

The Travellers will face a number of questions, not all of which are relevant. Some are simply fishing, others more specific, and some are intended to confuse. The Travellers might go away wondering why certain questions were asked and end up following a false lead. This is the point of such questions – they conceal the true intentions of Omicron Division.

Omicron Responses

Question	Basic Response	Additional Information
Why is this boarding taking place?	Our remit permits us to board and inspect any vessel deemed to require it.	There is evidence that persons aboard this vessel may have entered a restricted area and/or be in possession of sensitive information.
Are you part of Omicron Division?	Our vessels and crew are private contractors operating alongside the Imperial Navy to increase the security of the region.	Yes.
What is Omicron Division?	Omicron Division is nothing more than a rumour. Our vessels and crew are private contractors operating alongside the Imperial Navy to increase the security of the region.	Omicron Division exists to discover and counter major threats to the Imperium and her people.
Who are you after?	This is a routine investigation.	If we were after someone specific we would already have them in custody. This is an investigation, nothing more.
Are you going to arrest someone?	Possibly, if our investigation produces a requirement.	If there is reason to believe someone has penetrated a restricted site or otherwise broken laws, yes.
Those are some pretty impressive ships. How did you get them?	We are well-funded, enabling us to command a high fee from clients in return.	They are indeed. We make use of cutting-edge and experimental technology that the navy will not receive for decades. Our personnel benefit from a similarly high level of equipment and support.
What do you want from me?	Information, nothing more. This is a routine investigation.	You have scratched the surface of a terrifying yet wondrous world. If you want to learn more or find out the truth, work with us.

The following are typical of those likely to be asked but the Referee can always add more or follow up on anything the Travellers say.

Why are you aboard this vessel? Omicron Division knows this is an 'Ancients conference', so anyone not admitting that is now known to be a liar. There is absolutely nothing illegal about spending a few days aboard a starship discussing the Ancients – or pretty much anything else – and admitting this has no real consequences for the Travellers.

Why were you invited to the conference? This is basically the same question rephrased. If the Travellers or other delegates can be induced to brag about their vast knowledge they may reveal something interesting or make it quite plain they are just clueless Wannabees.

What are your qualifications in the field? Again, a chance to brag about contacts, achievements or artefacts retrieved. Generally fishing for information.

Which Ancients sites have you visited? There are numerous known Ancients sites which are basically museums the public can visit. Others require clearance but can be visited by those willing to pay the fees or who have the qualifications. There is always the possibility that someone will let slip they sneaked into a site that officially does not exist or has been Red Zoned. This would indicate they are a Potential Asset or Threat, depending on their attitude.

Which of the delegates knows the most about the Ancients? This is a chance to denounce Wannabees and point out who is actually knowledgeable. Again, this leads to assessment as threat, asset or worthless hanger-on.

Is anyone on the ship a threat to the security of the Imperium? The obvious connotation is Ancients-related but occasionally a question of this sort produces an unexpected result.

Do you possess any Ancients artefacts? It is possible to possess certain items, although functional devices are considered property of the Emperor. They might be given to investigators or academics for study, or perhaps used to gain access to a site, but the Travellers are unlikely to be the sort of people trusted with such items so possessing them would be illegal. Travellers who admit they have something and hand it over may earn themselves Potential Asset status and might even be given the item back if they can provide justification which benefits the mission of Omicron Division.

What really happened at Calefaction? This is a big and open question, sprung suddenly as the interview seems to be winding up. The Travellers will not be permitted to leave until they have provided an account of the incident at Calefaction. Omicron Division knows that Ancients artefacts were involved but are reasonably sure the Travellers did not deliberately destroy a planet. However, 'reasonably sure' is not good enough in such matters. Omicron Division wants first-hand accounts of the whole incident. Ideally, the Travellers will be able to talk them through what happened and shed additional light on the matter. They have already interviewed the survivors from Fuller, so know the problem was already developing before the Travellers got involved but the timing of their arrival looks suspicious.

Were Ancients artefacts involved in the destruction of Calefaction? Tell us what you know about the ones you saw. Omicron division already knows there was Ancients involvement but any information could be useful.

Who was involved with the artefacts? In what way? Omicron Division is trying to build a picture of who did what, partly to determine who caused the planetary destruction and partly to learn more about the artefacts involved.

So who was responsible for the destruction of Calefaction? This is a simple and direct question, which may or may not have a simple answer.

Please summarise what happened during your visit to Calefaction. The Travellers are being invited to repeat a short version of their story, which will be cross-referenced with other accounts and their own earlier statements.

Tell us about Sorrel Tergaii. Sorrel is the prime suspect in the Calefaction incident and Omicron Division wants to know about wider implications.

Do you have any evidence of your actions? The Travellers will be allowed to think they may be blamed for the incident, in the hope they provide recordings or other hard data. To their probable surprise this request will not be pushed and they are not accused of anything.

ENDING THE INTERVIEW

At the end of the interview, the Omicron officers politely thank the Traveller for their assistance and inform them they are free to go. This may come as a surprise and indeed there are more surprises. The Travellers were scanned for weapons but never searched and their quarters were not entered. If they have concealed artefacts or not admitted to having them, Omicron Division will act like it does not know they have anything. In fact it is likely to be aware and will consider anyone who has artefacts and who did not reveal them to be a Potential Asset or Threat, with the likelihood being Threat. However, it is sometimes better to let small fish have a long line, so to speak, and to let them run for a while. Omicron Division is playing a long game and can afford to let a few Travellers think they have outsmarted the authorities.

Overall, the interviews are about obtaining information but serve the secondary purpose of either deterring amateurs or recruiting them. The Travellers will be allowed to go free unless they absolutely must be detained. Omicron Division cannot ignore assaults upon its personnel but otherwise prefers to let the Travellers go with the intent of monitoring them. The same applies to the other delegates, with at least one exception. The Captain of Knowledge is arrested and escorted off the liner by Omicron officers. He seems scared but at the same time oddly delighted. As well he might be, since this is vindication of his status as the Ancients Hunter supreme.

In fact, the Captain is being arrested mainly because he ran his mouth off and made claims that required further investigation. There is also a subtext to this event – Omicron Division is reminding everyone that they might be better off finding a less questionable hobby. Ancients hunting is not illegal but can lead to places and actions that will get the hunter thrown in jail. It is possible that someone else will also be arrested, if the Travellers pointed fingers.

Those arrested will be questioned at great length aboard the Omicron ships and may (correctly) suspect they have been subjected to psionic probing. In the case of the Travellers being among the arrestees, the Referee should not take them out of play unless they have done something which requires incarceration pending trial, and even then they will be offered the chance to work covertly for Omicron Division in return for the problem quietly going away. Other arrestees will eventually resurface, having been induced to act as informants for Omicron Division.

AFTERWARD

With the Captain of Knowledge and possibly others in custody, the conference has been derailed. The liner's commanding officer announces that the ship has been ordered to return to port and everyone will be put ashore at Aki. In fact the vessel has been re-tasked now that the conference has served its purpose but that will not be made plain to the Travellers. They are free to enjoy the ship and conduct whatever business they please during the return flight.

Reactions among the attendees vary. Some are outraged, some scared. Vlen Backett seems amused. If the Travellers ask, he tells them he has been aware of Omicron Division 'for some time'. He is not sure how long they have been on his radar but it is as long as he can remember. It is possible that during *Secrets of the Ancients* the Travellers might find out just how old he is, which could shed light on how long Omicron Division has existed.

Events elsewhere require the re-tasking of Omicron assets in the near future, meaning they have little or no involvement in *Secrets of the Ancients*. The Travellers may encounter *Glisten Pearl* again and may be surprised to discover the vessel belonged to Omicron Division all along. They are now aware of the existence of the Division and that it has access to extremely advanced craft. This will become significant in *Wrath of the Ancients.*

The Travellers will have learned something else as well. Before he was interrupted, the Captain of Knowledge was dissecting the text of *Twilight's Peak* with the assistance of handwritten notes. He was not aware of the significance of this document and assumed it was just someone's analysis. The Travellers know better; the handwriting is the same as the original manuscript.

Among the Captain of Knowledge's conference materials is the original copy – handwritten on actual paper. It is clearly recent, in the sense that it shows no signs of deterioration or aging. In fact, this document was presented to the Captain by an Omicron Division operative who did not realise its true significance. It was recovered among a cache of items owned by a minor Player in the Ancients Hunter community. Unable to determine its significance and assuming it had none, this document was given to the Captain as part of a plan to draw out other Players.

THE OMICRON AGENDA

Omicron Division already has a fair idea of what happened at Calefaction. They interviewed the group from Fuller who escaped in the EAV and have a little hard evidence in the form of recordings on their personal devices. Omicron Division knows that a group of researchers 'got religion' and correctly assumes that one of their number caused the catastrophe. They are almost certain it was Sorrel. Since the Travellers arrived long after the plan to destroy Calefaction was implemented they are obviously not directly responsible – but they might have been Sorrel's escape plan or involved in some other way.

Omicron Division is very interested in the Travellers and is playing a risky game by letting them run. Their thinking is that if the Travellers are just a bunch of adventurers who were in the wrong place then there is no harm and if they are involved in something big they might lead Omicron Division to a greater threat. There is an irony to this, in that the Travellers are not yet involved in 'something big' but they are about to become entangled in something *very* big indeed. The decision to let them run is the correct one, at least in terms of Omicron's remit.

If the Travellers do not investigate this document, one of the other attendees will bring it to their attention. Vlen does not know about the connection with the *Twilight's Peak* manuscript but does know Mercedes Karamaka and will eventually recognise her handwriting. He has pressing business elsewhere but wishes to find out more about this document and why the Captain had it. He decides to tell the Travellers about Mercedes and point them to her location, reasoning she might be in danger from Omicron Division.

Vlen will tell the Travellers he recognises the handwriting and who it belongs to, and expresses surprise she is still alive. If she is, he says, she is living in a small town named Respis on Pagaton. If Omicron Division have taken an interest in her, it is time she moved on. He asks that the Travellers visit her and extend his compliments along with the warning, and if they are feeling kind that they help her relocate. He will owe them a favour, he says.

After reaching Aki, Vlen departs on another ship and will not feature again in this campaign. However, the Travellers will meet him again in *Secrets of the Ancients*. He has had dealings with Mercedes Karamaka on several occasions and respects her. He hopes one day to recruit her to work with him, although so far she has resisted his invitations. Vlen does not know why or how but he suspects Mercedes is somehow important to his own plans. If the Travellers help Vlen (and Mercedes) here, this will establish the connection discussed at the beginning of *Secrets of the Ancients* and provide the Referee with a solid plot hook for that portion of the campaign.

MERCEDES

Events so far are pointing the Travellers towards Mercedes Karamaka; the handwritten manuscript, her former crewmate Sorrel and now Vlen Backett. Omicron Division has taken an interest in her as well. It should be obvious that she has answers to the Travellers' many questions. Now that the Travellers have a location – the town of Respis on Pagaton – they have a chance to unravel what is really going. However, time is limited. Omicron Division is distracted but can still put together enough of a force to capture or eliminate Mercedes, and it is possible that the Travellers will see an entirely different side to the organisation. They have encountered the polite, restrained approach taken when Omicron Division hopes to recruit or co-opt someone. They are about to meet the ruthless efficiency of an organisation dedicated to eliminating 'unusual' threats to the Imperium.

A SUDDEN DISTRACTION

The Omicron Division task force in the Aki system is not the only one available but the organisation does not have resources on the scale of the Imperial Navy. The task force is designated Task Force *Deneb Bulwark* after the light carrier serving as its flagship and contains the light cruiser *Ardent Diamond,* as well as several advanced destroyers. In the event of a major war these vessels might be quietly transferred to Imperial Navy control under the pretence they were contributed by the Colonial Fleet. Omicron Division would resist such a move, although perhaps not successfully, since it believes that even a new Frontier War would fall outside its remit.

This is not just arrogance; Omicron Division knows that there are threats out there which lie beyond the capabilities of conventional forces. It has narrowly averted a number of catastrophes over the years, usually by the actions of a small but determined group of well-equipped agents. 'Kill the monster while it is small' is the usual strategy, though this requires a constant flow of information and the ability to react quickly once a threat is confirmed.

The Travellers have no way of knowing but the events at Calefaction have triggered a new threat. During the Final War which destroyed the Ancients civilisation, numerous backup plans and long-term projects were put into development. Some were never deployed, usually because their controlling leaders or installations were taken out before the project could be completed or ordered into action. Some of these projects died slowly but others remain hidden. One of them begins stirring into life once Calefaction is destroyed.

During the breakup of the planet, a pulse of energy, of an unknown type, was emitted by the rods. It was not detectable by standard sensors and not initially noticed amid the radiation and radio-frequency emissions of the star. Flares and turbulence further obscured the signal, to the point where it was picked up by very few detectors and of them even fewer were available to Omicron Division. At a time that coincided with the arrival of the pulse in the Caledonia outsystem, a larger energy pulse was detected from an outsystem cometary body.

Investigating, a team from Omicron Division reported some kind of long-dormant installation on the comet, then went out of contact when a series of huge explosions broke the body up. Omicron Division does not know the significance of any of this, nor that the installation contained a communications device in the form of a teleporter. Far away, in the Trojan Reach, another installation received whatever was sent from Caledonia. It began to wake up.

Omicron Division does not know what is happening yet but there are indications that something is afoot. The *Deneb Bulwark* task force has been assigned to investigate and respond as a matter of urgency. This means slowing down the investigation into Vlen Backett and the Travellers, and operating with reduced capabilities in the Glisten subsector. There are, however, other assets available. One of them is the liner *Glisten Pearl*, which is now the primary Omicron Division asset in the subsector.

The implications of these events will become apparent in *Wrath of the Ancients*. For now, what matters is that Omicron Division must move more slowly in Glisten than originally envisaged. This will give the Travellers a chance to find Mercedes and get answers before Omicron Division closes in.

RUNNING WITH THE WOLVES

According to the Travellers' sources, Mercedes Karamaka – or whatever identity she is using these days – is on Pagaton in District 268. Pagaton lies beyond the Imperial border, four parsecs from Aki as the x-boat jumps. However, unless the Travellers possess a jump-3 or better ship it will take them at least three jumps to get there.

The Wiess-Lydia-Pagaton route makes efficient use of a jump-2 ship. Lydia has only the most rudimentary of starports, which may or may not be an asset. If the Travellers want to conceal their movements, going by way of Lydia and using gas giant refuelling is a good option. Ships passing through Weiss are likely to be detected whether or not they use the port but the chances of encountering other vessels – let alone a navy patrol – in Lydia are very low.

Windsor-Melior-Pagaton offers similar benefits in terms of avoiding being tracked, although the lack of gas giant refuelling capability at Windsor will necessitate a trip to the mainworld's mediocre starport. The Travellers could also go by way of Callia-Binges-Pagaton, although this requires passing through the Class A starport at Binges which has extensive transborder trade. Inspections and questions about destination are much more likely here. Jump-1 ships will have no choice but to slog around the Aki-Pagaton loop, going through Glisten, Overnale, Callia, Melior, Binges and finally making port at Pagaton.

Whichever way they choose to go, the Travellers can always try to pick up information, find Ancients experts, or do whatever else they like. There are clues to be found in some of the ports the Travellers may visit but it is not necessary to have all this information in order to 'solve' the riddle of Twilight's Peak. There is also the possibility of side adventures or projects the Travellers feel they need to pursue. For example, the Travellers might decide they have to find themselves more powerful weapons or clothing suitable for the Ducal court. There is nothing to prevent them from having additional adventures or incidents along the way.

Callia and Weiss have already been visited by the Travellers. They are described on page 70 and page 166 respectively. At Callia the Travellers might hear rumours about some kind of incident on-planet, with few details available. Indeed, they know more about what has happened than the authorities. Dropping in to meet with Blanca would be a poor idea; anyone poking around Makintown will attract attention; doubly so anyone known to have been there around the time of the incident. Just refuelling at the converted tanker and moving on will not bring the Travellers to the authorities' notice.

Nothing much has changed at Wiess. The Travellers might encounter the same patrol ship and receive a 'recent inspection; no search required' message. Other than this, Weiss is likely to be a safe and uneventful stopover, other than reams of advisories about crossing the border and port-of-entry regulations upon return. The Travellers might stop in to visit Rafem, who may be able to help with minor administrative matters but knows nothing about Calefaction, Mercedes Karamaka or Twilight's Peak.

BINGES

Binges lies just outside the Imperial border but will probably be annexed within a generation or so. The mainworld is a rockball with no atmosphere or water and the system has no gas giants. This would represent an obstacle to navigation if the system lay on the route to anywhere but at present there is little reason to pass through Binges except to reach the equally unimportant Pagaton. Nevertheless, the system has a new and extensive Class A starport.

Construction of the port began in 812, although this was a rather more modest endeavour than the present port and primarily intended to support surface prospecting, mining and infrastructure development. The mineral resources of Binges turned out to be much smaller than anticipated, with good deposits proving unusually difficult to get at. The magnitude of the 'Binges Bubble', as this incident is sometimes known, is greatly inflated for the most part, but the opening-up of Binges had attracted considerable investment. This was brought to nothing when the Glisten First Bank foreclosed on a huge development loan. Most of the investors cut their losses and got out.

The few who remained owned a planet which might someday be an Imperial world. The idea of becoming a world government appealed to at least some of them, causing a small settlement to be maintained despite the associated economic difficulties. The small, part-built orbital facility brought in a little revenue which proved sufficient to support a few oligarchs and their households. For several decades this situation continued unchanged, until a consortium of investors presented a plan to greatly expand the starport. This may have been in anticipation of Imperial expansion, which does seem likely to happen at some point, but the creation of a major port just outside the Imperial border also had the potential to be lucrative.

Today, the highport at Binges competes with Mertactor for transborder trade from Dallia and worlds deeper in District 268. There are two distinct commercial spacing sectors; vessels capable of jump-2 and higher operating in District 268, and a transborder trade fleet comprising mainly jump-1 ships. These mostly wend their way to and from Glisten, enabling clients outside the Imperium to get their hands on TL15 consumer goods and electronics. The revenue from the expanded port goes mainly to its investors but enough reaches the coffers of the planetary oligarchs that they are now able to expand their business holdings and their estates.

BINGES

UWP: A500231–A

Starport	A	Excellent
Size	5	8,000km
Atmosphere	0	No atmosphere
Hydrosphere	0	Desert world
Population	2	Hundreds
Government Type	3	Self-perpetuating oligarchy
Law Level	1	Body pistols, explosives and poison gas prohibited
Technology Level	A	Early stellar

ACTIVITIES AT BINGES

If the Travellers pass through Binges they will have little need to descend to the planetary surface. The highport is new and well set up, with an interesting character. Lying just outside the Imperial border it is a meeting point between cultures and economies. High-tech goods such as those from Glisten are always popular but there is also a good market for TL8–12 goods which can be cheaply produced in the Imperium on a scale that cannot be matched elsewhere. The inward flow of commerce is smaller but ship operators would in general rather make tiny profits than ship empty hold space. As a result, all manner of mid-tech goods are for sale at Binges, some of them making it all the way to Trin's Veil.

The highport has a large population, greatly outnumbering the planetary populace, and is quite diverse. There are enclaves of Darrians and Sword Worlders – who do not get along at all well but generally respect the neutrality of the venue. Indeed, a certain amount of back-channels diplomacy takes place at Binges and as a result ships from both powers can often be encountered in port. Binges is therefore a good place to make contacts on both sides of the border, or to engage in trade of unusual items. It is possible there are Ancients artefacts dealers present if the Travellers take the time to look for them but equally such a strong prospect for a dealing location is likely to be watched by the authorities.

GLISTEN

Glisten is the subsector capital and one of the most important systems in the Spinward Marches. The 'mainworld' of the system is in fact an asteroid belt, with the eight billion or so inhabitants mostly dwelling on several dwarf planets. Of these, Gliss Ten is the most important. Gliss is the name of the system's primary, and Gliss Ten was originally just a numbered settlement in a system under development. It is a measure of just how much development took place that the whole subsector is now essentially named after an asteroid.

The system is unusual in that it has no terrestrial planets and just one gas giant. The main (Glisten) and secondary (Pluvis) planetoid belts are rich in minerals and metals, with well-developed industrial economies centred on the larger dwarf planets. There are numerous small communities in the belt but most of the population live in large cities like those found on any terrestrial planet and have little in common with the Belter communities typical of planetoid systems.

The population of the Glisten system numbers in the billions, housed in large cities built on asteroids throughout the belt. Each city has its own administrative apparatus, all of which ultimately form part of the efficient but dull Glisten Coordinating Authority, a civil service government that runs the system as a whole. Laws are moderate but with so many settlements housing vast numbers of people, scattered across the entire system, a rather stodgy administration has emerged with a fair amount of red tape wrapped around almost any activity.

The capital of the system is Glisten City, a huge metropolis that grew out of the much smaller Gliss Ten settlement chosen as administrative centre for the system long ago. Glisten City is the site of the huge starport and serves as the main centre for trade and business of all kinds as well as the administrative capital. Many other cities are specialised in their industrial or social activities.

Glisten has an extensive TL15 economy, with most of its trade going trailingward through Bendor into Trin's Veil subsector. If the long-mooted Imperial expansion into and through District 268 ever takes place Glisten will be the driving force but for now the subsector has the feeling of an internal backwater rather than a frontier province. Glisten is a provincial capital, in effect; hugely important locally but less so in the affairs of the sector.

The system has a scout and naval base, and sees a considerable amount of traffic to and from both. The 100th Fleet, tasked with protecting and policing the subsector, has a much higher than usual proportion of mediocre officers. There are also a few who are too well-connected to be censured and who tend to be promoted out of the way into places like Glisten. As a result the local fleet is below standard, with poor morale and a tendency towards being seen to follow regulations rather than solving problems.

GLISTEN

UWP: A000986–F

Starport	A	Excellent
Size	0	Asteroid belt
Atmosphere	0	No atmosphere
Hydrosphere	0	Asteroid belt
Population	9	Billions
Government Type	8	Civil service bureaucracy
Law Level	6	All firearms except shotguns prohibited
Technology Level	F	High stellar

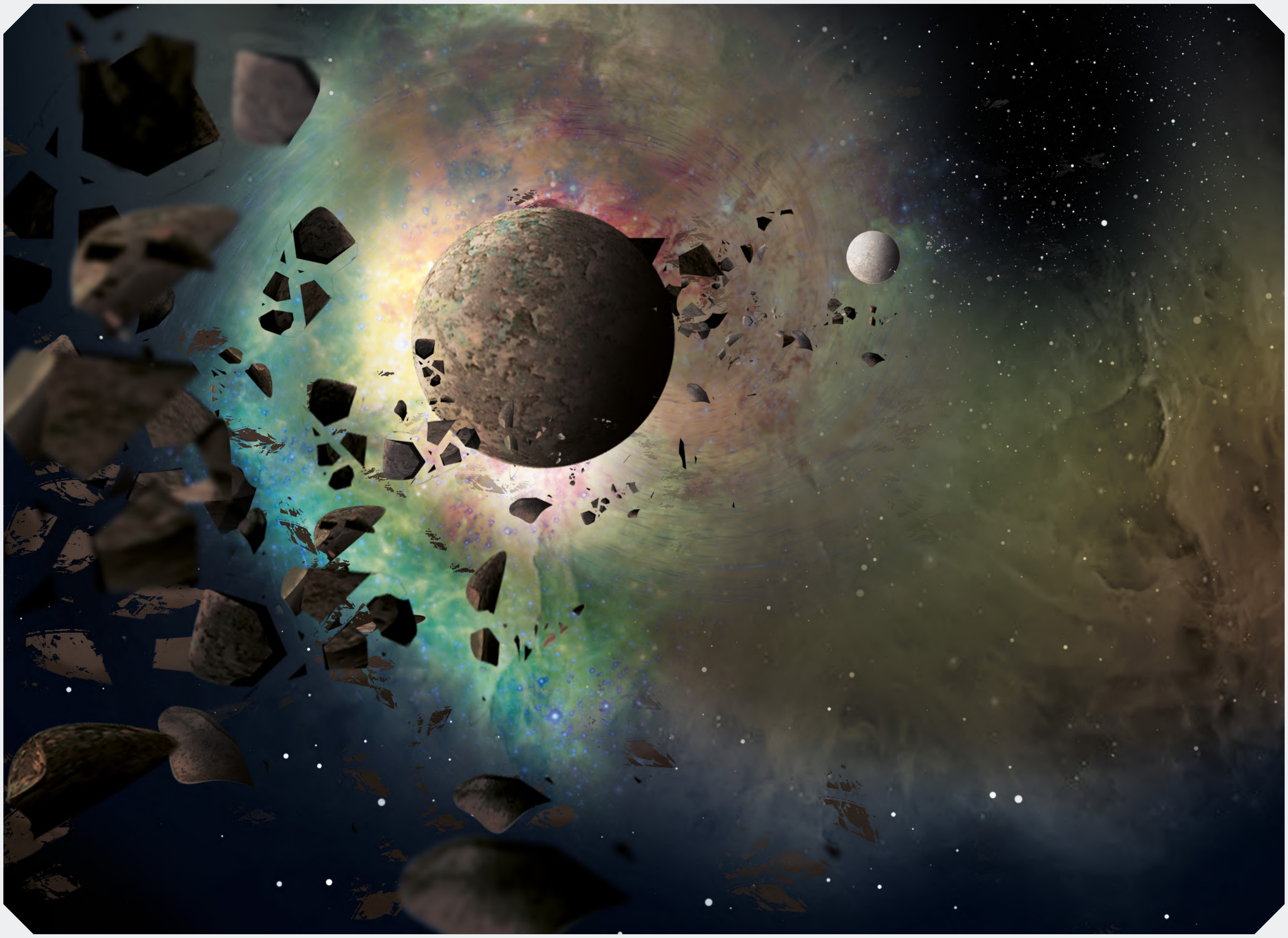
ACTIVITIES AT GLISTEN

There is a lot the Travellers could do at Glisten, although little directly connected with the campaign. Glisten City has extensive recreation facilities and the system is also a popular place to obtain refits and arrange starship modifications.

If the Travellers investigate shipbuilding and maintenance in the Glisten system they will discover, initially, that there is rather a lot of it. This is not much of a surprise and the Travellers will also be able to learn that the Pluvis Belt is the main location for shipyards, as well as the naval base. There are large megacorporate yards, which do a lot of business with the Imperial Navy and smaller builders. Some of these appear to be specialist facilities which do not advertise their services. That is unusual; typically a launch or delivery is trumpeted throughout the datanets as a form of advertising. Some of the smaller yards are secretive about their contracts, suggesting they are dealing with clients who do not want anyone to know how many ships they have nor what type. Omicron Division would be such a client.

Glisten also houses the Imperial Navy Archive for the sector. It is open to the public, although some details are classified and will not be released. The archive is a rather grand structure with a museum to great commanders and famous ships serving in the Marches. Relatively few of them are connected with the 100th Fleet but there are extensive records of its campaigns. Among these is a period during the Third Frontier War officially known as the Danzuekhsgiz Goughgerr Incursion but unofficially as the Wolfpack War.

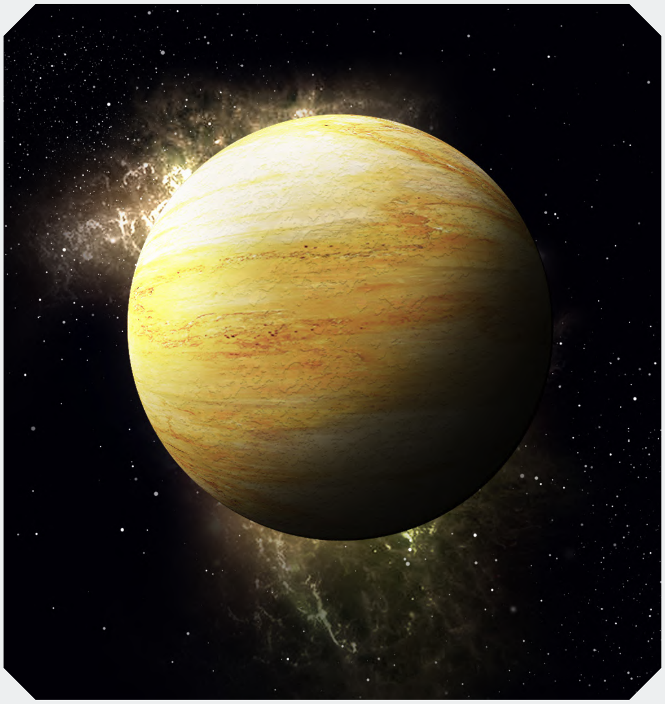
During the Danzuekhsgiz Goughgerr Incursion, a large force of Vargr mercenaries came to the region to harass Imperial traffic in District 268. Their commander, the self-styled Grand Corsair Danzuekhsgiz Goughgerr, referred to his irregular squadrons as wolfpacks; unusual, since most Vargr find ‘dog’ and ‘wolf’ references offensive but the Grand Corsair apparently wanted to turn a slur into a badge of honour or a fearsome slogan.



The Incursion caused significant disruption, including a foray right across Glisten and into Trin's Veil, but suddenly decreased in effectiveness. The fate of the Grand Corsair is unknown. It is believed he perished in a skirmish, after which his force dissolved into infighting. A rather derisive news report of the late war talks of how the 'cub packs' were subsequently run down and destroyed or chased out of Imperial space and speculates on the fate of their leader. Had he lived, perhaps Danzuekhsgiz Goughgerr might be counted among the greatest of Vargr corsairs. This is media hype, of course. Danzuekhsgiz Goughgerr was a good but not exceptional leader who was in the right place with the right backing. A severe nuisance but nothing more than that.

LYDIA

In astrographical terms Lydia lies within the Glisten subsector but politically and strategically it is better considered part of District 268. With a small population and no industry to speak of there is little reason to visit the world. Nor is it on the route to anywhere important. Jump-2 ships out of Wiess sometimes refuel at the gas giants but few visit the mainworld. As a result, the few navy patrols that do visit are more interested in the outsystem than Lydia itself. Whilst officially an Imperial member world, Lydia is utterly inconsequential in the affairs of the subsector and for the most part its 90,000 or so inhabitants live out their lives in complete ignorance of the outside universe.



Lydia is tidally locked, with a trace atmosphere and no surface water. Despite this, it has an ecosystem of sorts. The most prominent life is the Akenplant, which appears cactus-like but is in fact a colony of smaller growths similar to lichen. Colonies can develop into complex systems of considerable size grouped into what are called forests but which bear more resemblance to a coral reef. Forests are generally stable but will occasionally collapse for unknown reasons, dying back to a few small patches before growing again.

The Akenplant is interesting to scientists, not least for its ability to crack coarse-grained rocks such as granite and anchor itself. It is thought to have some potential use as a way to leach minerals out of otherwise forbidding terrain and is the subject of the occasional research project. As a result, it is possible to encounter parties from scientific institutions such as the Glisten Institute of Planetary Studies (GLIPS) on Lydia. These provide the only offworld contact the population may have for years on end. Visitors are welcomed politely enough but there is no real enthusiasm for offworld contact. In short, the people of Lydia are content in their isolation.

The entire population of Lydia dwell in a natural cavern system which has been expanded and developed into an underground city. It is not clear when the first colonists arrived but whatever technology they had has gradually regressed to a sustainable TL7 level. Local engineers are more rule-of-thumb craftsmen than anything else but they are

LYDIA

UWP: E310430–7

Starport	E	Frontier
Size	3	4,800km
Atmosphere	1	Trace
Hydrosphere	0	Desert world
Population	4	Tens of thousands
Government Type	3	Self-perpetuating oligarchy
Law Level	0	No prohibitions
Technology Level	7	Pre-stellar

able to hand-build effective life support equipment and keep it working. In the long term, Lydia will need an injection of materials and equipment to prevent collapse, but the skill of the locals means that day is a long way off. Ironically, since the Scout Service is aware of the situation, a plan to provide aid has been repeatedly pushed back. The subsector authorities only have so much money and until Lydia reaches the point where survival is in doubt there will be more pressing projects. To cynical observers this translates to an acceptance that Lydia will have to be supported at some point as a requirement of its Imperial membership but worlds that might actually produce a return on the investment are a more attractive option.

ACTIVITIES ON LYDIA

There is not much for the Travellers to do on Lydia if they visit. They are much more likely to bypass the mainworld as most visitors to the system do, and refuel at one of the gas giants instead. They will be back, however, since Lydia is the location of the legendary Twilight's Peak. There is no chance of the Travellers detecting the Ancients base as they pass. Debris from the incident there a century ago has been removed by salvagers. The Travellers could fly right over and not realise they were on top of something wonderous.

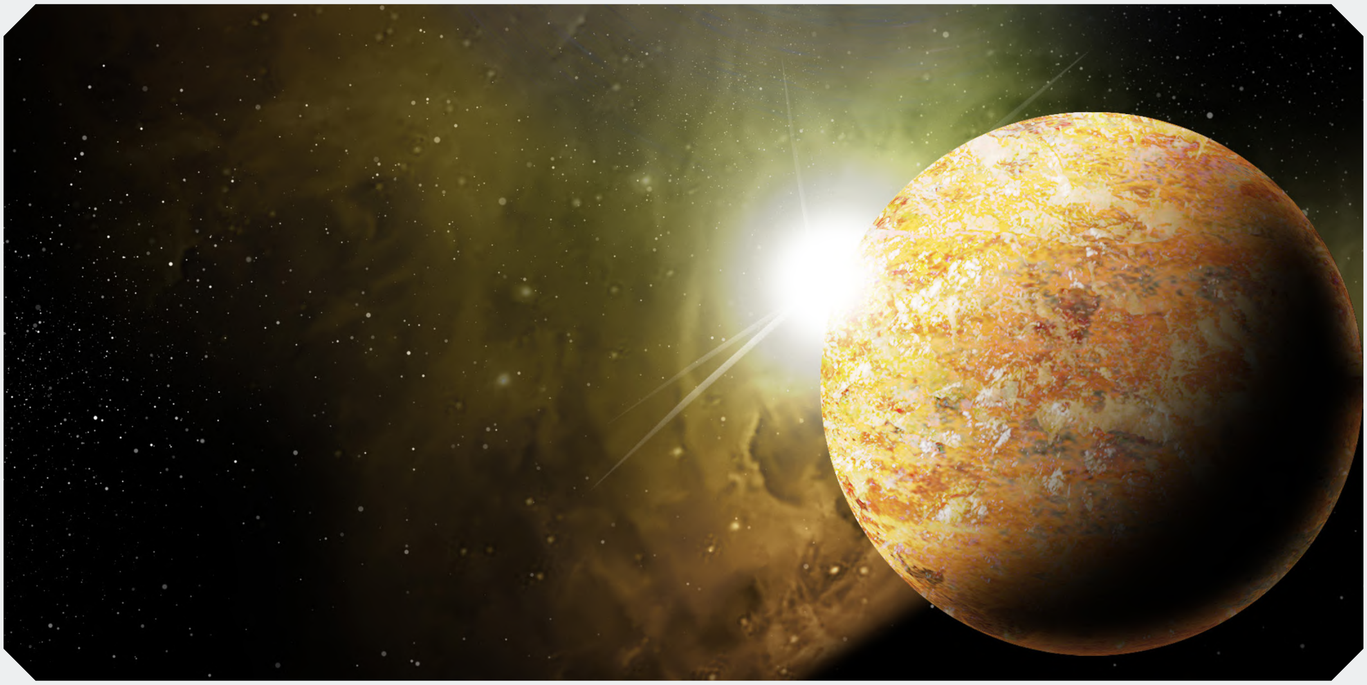
MELIOR

Melior is an Imperial member world but has never been of any importance. It is inhabited by about 70,000 people of whom about half are Jonkeereen. As a 'desert world with some potential', Melior was earmarked as a site for experimental terraforming, with ice-bearing asteroids dropped onto uninhabited areas over an extended period. This needs to be done with great care to avoid causing a catastrophe but in theory by the mid- to late 1100s Melior might have sufficient surface water to alter its ecological balance.

MELIOR

UWP: D-540466-7

Starport	D	Poor
Size	5	8,000km
Atmosphere	4	Thin; tainted
Hydrosphere	0	Desert world
Population	4	Tens of thousands
Government Type	6	Captive government/ colony
Law Level	6	All firearms except shotguns prohibited
Technology Level	7	Pre-stellar



Settlements of humans and Jonkeereen are generally separate, and usually small. They exist wherever a reliable water source exists; typically atop aquifers or along the course of underground rivers. There is no planetary government as such, as a branch of the Imperial Colonial Office at Egypt oversees the affairs of the world – such as they are. The world is Amber Zoned as a result of the terraforming project and visitors are warned that straying outside settled zones is potentially hazardous. There is a 'no rescue' policy in place for such areas. Starfarers are under no obligation to respond to distress calls from within hazard zones.

There is sometimes friction between the mainstream human population and the Jonkeereen, which is not helped by the existence of what amounts to motorised nomads. These use a mix of vehicles and a local animal known as a yalhi – vaguely similar to a camel – to wander around trading and occasionally raiding settlements. This is less of a problem than certain recent docuvids have suggested; Melior is not a war zone of mutually raiding motor-nomad tribes, although skirmishes occur from time-to-time.

ACTIVITIES AT MELIOR

Visiting Travellers usually go no further than the small downport, which offers overpriced unrefined starship fuel and trinkets for sale… and not much else. Melior has no significant industry and sees virtually no offworld trade. Merchants with very small overheads can make some pocket cash selling small quantities of necessary goods and even water will find a market at Melior. However, there is little money to buy it with and even less a merchant might want in return.

If the Travellers dig around they will encounter a tale of how a warship crash-landed in the desert during the Third Frontier War. It was crewed by Vargr, most of whom had perished by the time the ship hit the ground. The survivors were unfriendly and took over a settlement at gunpoint. They lorded it over the locals for a year or so before departing in a launch they fixed up. Presumably they were able to rendezvous with another ship; they never came back.

The wreck was stripped by salvagers after the war, with the locals seeing none of the profits. What remains is out in the desert, at the edge of the settled zone. Travellers visiting or overflying the site will be disappointed; little more than a mound exists now. However, detailed scanning reveals the skeleton of a characteristically Vargr corsair vessel. Records available at any major starport note that the raider *Gazuz* was crippled by a navy patrol vessel during the Wolfpack War phase of the Third Frontier War, and crash-landed on Melior. There are no official records of what happened to the crew.

OVERNALE

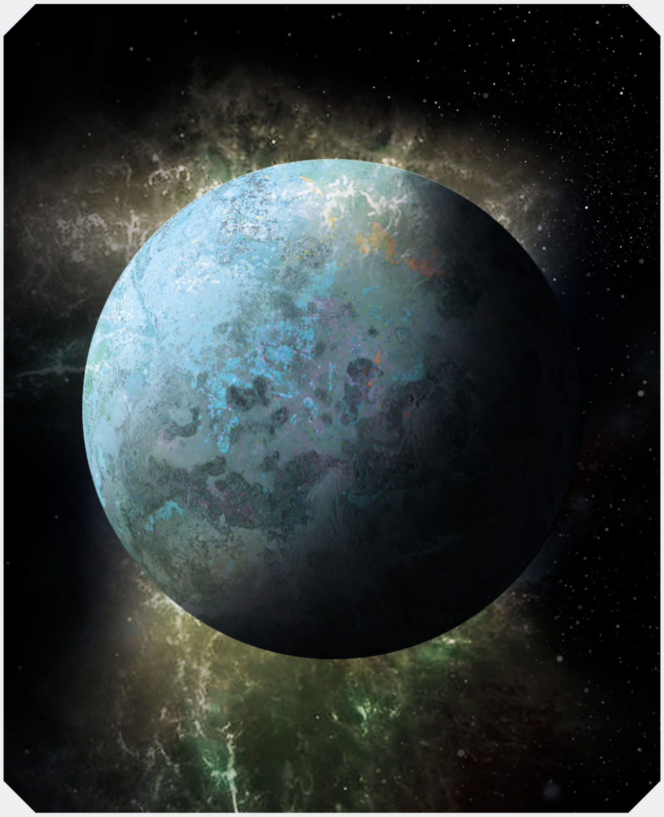
Overnale is a link on the jump-1 route out into District 268. Its Class B starport receives considerable local traffic as a result, along with jump-2 ships running the Glisten-Overnale-Egypt-Mertactor chain. The mainworld itself is balkanised, with a small startown surrounding the port serving as a neutral location for trade and diplomacy. None of the world's nations is very large, with a total population of a little over four million. Economic importance is therefore slight and politically Overnale is significant only for as a commerce link.

The world itself is quite pleasant, with a thin atmosphere and just about enough water. Its biosphere is well adjusted to these conditions and has in general resisted the introduction of offworld species. Local plant life is in general riotous, enabling small numbers of workers to produce a volume of crops worth exporting. Chief among the world's products, at least in terms of fame, is the uffleberry. Briefly popular as an 'ultrafood' attributed with near-mystical health-giving properties, the uffleberry is used to make ufflewine. Rich and dark, ufflewine is the subject of some dispute; some say it is truly a wine, others put it in the 'country wine' or 'fruit wine' category. Whilst the distinction can seem petty, to the producers it represents the difference between a modest sale price and a luxury-goods one.

OVERNALE

UWP: B55467A–9

Starport	B	Good
Size	5	8,000km
Atmosphere	5	Thin
Hydrosphere	4	40%
Population	6	Millions
Government Type	7	Balkanisation
Law Level	A	Weapon possession prohibited
Technology Level	9	Pre-stellar



ACTIVITIES ON OVERNALE

The Travellers have no reason to descend to the surface of Overnale, unless of course they feel like picking their own uffleberries. The highport sees extensive trade and has a much larger population than the relatively unimportant downport. It has the character of a city in space, with a vibrant entertainment scene as well as plenty of commercial opportunities. There is the usual possibility of locating an Ancients expert here.

WINDSOR

The Windsor system is a binary, with the superjovian planet Vintii almost counting as a third stellar object. It orbits close to the K9 primary and emits enough heat to affect the climate of Windsor itself, which is one of the moons of Vintii. The system was charted and claimed in the 200s by the Al Morai merchant line, and subsequently bought by Ling-Standard Products. Since that time it has been a corporate property, which does not preclude membership of the Imperium as a sovereign state. There are all kinds of legal and constitutional issues surrounding the rights of a corporate subsidiary which is also a world government, but these are a matter for high-level wrangling in the Imperial Moot. To most visitors Windsor is a sovereign world like any other, with just less diversity in branding.

The population of some 200,000 are citizens of their homeworld rather than corporate employees, although a great many work for LSP directly or are employed by local subsidiaries which provide essential services. The economy is set up as a self-sustaining industrial base, requiring few imports and producing significant quantities of exported goods. The listed TL9 applies to what is readily available for purchase and what the local population has access to in terms of domestic technology. Industrial and agricultural facilities generally use TL12 imported machinery ranging from farm robots to huge manufacturing plants. Business is organised on a large scale for the most part and efficiently run. This translates to a high income and good standard of living on what would otherwise appear to be a very ordinary backwater world.

Windsor's starport is extensive but geared towards large corporate freighters – or their bulk shuttles – rather than commercial traffic. The part of the port most visitors see is typical of a Class C facility, with modest and rather bland facilities available to starfarers. The system receives relatively little local traffic and few ships overall other than LSP's freighters. These often set aside part of their capacity for general goods, which means that sometimes the shops of Windsor are flooded with consumer items or novelties from across the sector.

WINDSOR

UWP: C783511–9

Starport	C	Routine
Size	7	11,200km
Atmosphere	8	Dense
Hydrosphere	3	30%
Population	5	Hundreds of thousands
Government Type	1	Company/corporation
Law Level	1	Body pistols, explosives and poison gas prohibited
Technology Level	9	Pre-stellar

ACTIVITIES AT WINDSOR

Windsor's location means it receives little non-corporate traffic, which translates to a population made up of long-term residents with few transients. Anyone new tends to stand out and there is a segment of the local population that craves ideas, news and gossip from other systems. These are available by way of recordings on the datanet but that is not the same as drinks in a bar with exciting new friends. Travellers will find it easy to be those new friends and can have a good time at Windsor, but there are those who take advantage. Slipping away and leaving the newcomers with the bill is annoyingly common. Other than this, Windsor is a typical starport in most ways. There is less chance than usual of finding Ancients experts or those who pretend to be one, due to the rather stuffy corporate culture of the world.

PAGATON

Pagaton lies beyond the Imperial border, in District 268. It is a pleasant enough world, with 90% water coverage and a standard atmosphere, whose 900 million or so inhabitants are divided among a great many small nations and enclaves. The average Tech Level is 4, with some areas a little lower and some higher. Some imported technology is available at the downport but there is little money to pay for it. As a result, items rather than cargoes are bought and sold at the port, and trade volumes are very low.

PAGATON

UWP: C769873–4

Starport	C	Routine
Size	7	11,200km
Atmosphere	6	Standard
Hydrosphere	9	90%
Population	8	Hundreds of thousands
Government Type	7	Balkanisation
Law Level	3	Machine guns, automatic rifles prohibited
Technology Level	4	Industrial

It is not clear exactly when Pagaton was settled. There are claims that Imperial settlers from Deneb took over some of the world's many island chains and some sources state they found an existing population. There are those who believe the original population were refugees from the Sindalian Empire in the Trojan Reach, whilst others claim a human population was placed on Pagaton in the very distant past. Whether this was in the early days of the Ziru Sirka, a transplanting of humans by the Ancients or some other circumstance depends upon the source.

What is clear is that Pagaton never had a very high population and since usable land is spread out as island groups and microcontinents there was room for newcomers. It is possible some new arrivals integrated or were absorbed by existing populations and that other groups never noticed anyone was here before them. What little research has been carried out has located several settlements dating back hundreds or perhaps thousands of years, along with evidence that there was once a higher-tech civilisation on Pagaton. In all likelihood this is the remains of the colony missions, none of which managed to retain its technology in the longer term.

One reason for this regression is a deepening ice age. It is in its early stages at present, with pack ice spreading and some of the world's few mountain ranges seeing increased glaciation. This has in turn affected ocean currents and weather patterns, making some areas less fertile than they once were. If Pagaton seemed a promising garden world in 400, by 800 it was obviously destined for collapse. External funding was unavailable and as a non-Imperial world Pagaton could not hope for intervention from the Scout Service or Colonial Office. Its nations had to chart their own course and there was only one possible destination.

Conflict is on the rise as Pagaton's small nations compete for resources. Fishing in particular has been heavily disrupted and clashes between armed trawlers or improvised fishery protection vessels are now common. Some nations have begun attempting to build real warships in anticipation of an expansion of conflict, whilst others are resorting to minor population movements as landgrabs or infiltration by way of small boats. Many areas are as yet quite peaceable, especially near the equator, but even there climate disruption is driving an increase in tensions.

ARRIVING AT PAGATON

Pagaton's Class C starport consists of a mooring beacon for larger ships and a tiny highport created out of old freighter fuel tanks linked by gantries. This rickety-looking contraption is kept in a stable orbit by an equally cobbled-together collection of old starship manoeuvre drive components. The setup works well enough and is only needed for the occasional orbital adjustment. All the same, starfarers used to more salubrious installations sometimes ponder the wisdom of going aboard. A couple of shuttles provide a service to the downport, where most of the facilities are located.

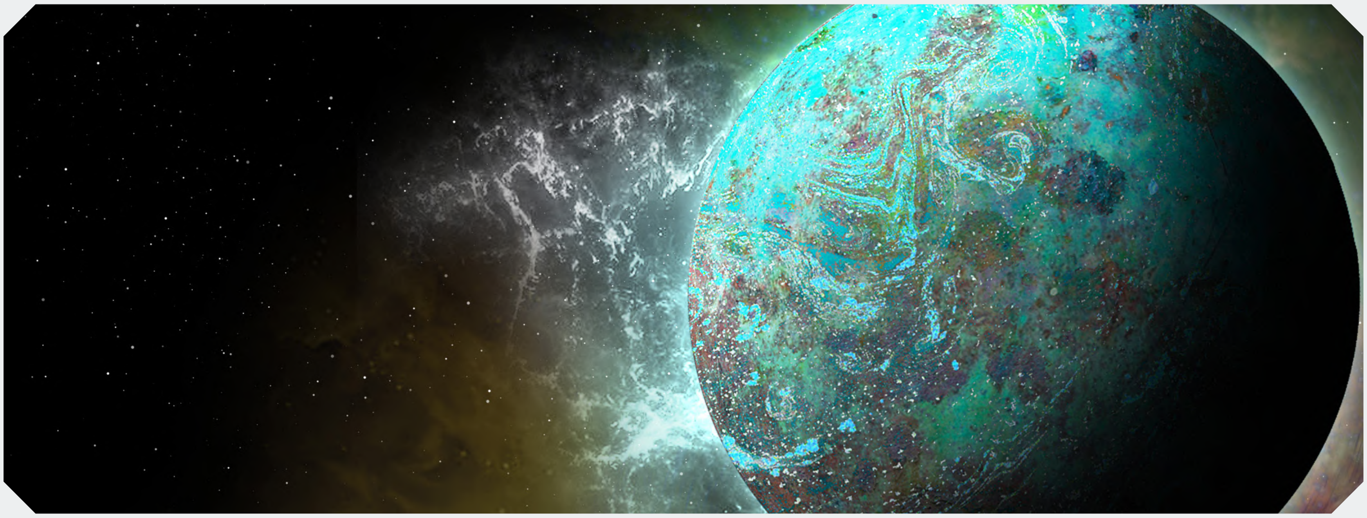
The downport is a small town located on an island in the Giplenn group. Four hundred years ago this was a fertile and attractive island chain with extensive wildlife and room for arable crops. Today it is bitterly cold, battered by frequent storms and subject to long, harsh winters. The local staple diet has changed from cereals and farmed meat to cold-water fish and various vegetables, and most of the former arable land is now cold grassland or being reclaimed by taiga forest.

The downport can handle several ships at once, a capacity it has never really needed. One side of the landing area has a passenger and light freight terminal whilst the other backs onto a maritime port frequented by local shipping. Ice is becoming a problem, to the point where the port staff have repurposed two steam-powered tugs as icebreakers. They are powerful enough for the role but too light, often jabbing away ineffectually at an ice build-up or becoming stuck and requiring rescue. Sometimes the other tug is sufficient but increasingly explosives are used to free a stuck vessel. Maritime trade is greatly impeded and clashes between ships waiting to enter the port are not infrequent.

When the Travellers arrive they encounter intermittent snow blowing almost horizontally across the landing area. One of the tugs is stuck in the ice and a party is preparing to launch a boat with charges to break up the coverage. Maritime ships prowl off the island's coast and if the Travellers watch carefully enough they will witness one ship apparently try to ram another. This causes the intended victim to go hard astern, allowing the more aggressive captain to move to the front of the queue waiting to land.

Clearance to land is provided by an auto-responder at the port, and despite the wind there is no real difficulty in making a landing. Ground service personnel are sluggish and clumsy in their heavy overcoats, and checks of the ship's papers are perfunctory at best. Entry to the planet is by way of the arrivals terminal, although it is possible to ignore the niceties and head straight over to the maritime port or out into the surrounding wilderness. That would not be advisable at this point.

Assuming the Travellers comply with local laws and register themselves at the port they will have no difficulty. Their arrival is added to the local records, which are stored on a TL9 personal computer bought some years ago to replace the last one. The Travellers probably have more processing power in their comms but for a backwater port little more is required. There are more guards than staff in evidence and astute Travellers might notice weapons emplacements around the periphery of the landing area and on the roof of the terminal building. Backwater ports are sometimes raided by unscrupulous starfarers but these weapons are targeted outward rather than upward. The Travellers may be able to figure out they are intended to deter attacks on the port by local nations rather than offworlders.



Once through what passes for customs the Travellers can sample the limited delights of the starport if they please. The startown has a population of around 6,000, most of whom consider themselves to be 'citizens of the port' as if it were a nation in its own right. In fact, Pagaton downport has a greater income than the rest of the planet put together and its citizens have a better quality of life. Offworld labour-saving devices are expensive and tend to be either held in common or operated as a business rather than privately. The Travellers might be amused to find a laundrette making use of laundry robots bought from a liner some years ago, or a tool-making business using a TL10 'home hobby-forge' and selling hardware to the whole populace.

If the Travellers ask or consult one of the few public data terminals they cannot find any reference to Mercedes Karamaka but her home settlement of Respis is easy enough to locate. It is a village about 50 kilometres inland. There is no road there but a steam railway links it to several other settlements and terminates at the mining town of Tagnvin at the other end of the island. Trains run every few hours, typically consisting of a single carriage and a few goods cars. There is no prohibition on using the Travellers' own vehicle or even bouncing over there in a starship, although landing might be a problem.

RESPIS

Respis is a typical small town on Pagaton. Three centuries ago it was a farming community surrounded by cereal crops, with animals grazing on the higher ground. Now most of the farms are abandoned and derelict, and the community has shrunk to about a quarter of its previous size. Those that remain have managed to change their crops to hardier varieties or work in necessary supporting industries. The town is constructed mainly in timber, using TL4 techniques and heated by nothing more sophisticated than open stoves. Many houses have fallen into disrepair or collapsed entirely, and those that remain have been given extra insulation in the form of lightly built structures over the walls and roof, stuffed with plant matter and fibres from the coats of animals such as the hardy sheep that now form the majority of herded animals.

The town tells a story of climate change, if the Travellers have the wit to see it. This was once an attractive valley with a temperate climate. Extensive rainfall was far more of a problem than cold and buildings were constructed accordingly. Modifications were made using whatever materials were available, resulting in ugly, jerry-built structures which are inconvenient to live and work in. Most houses have either an external insulation layer held in place by supporting frameworks or a windbreak around the outside, sometimes with a lean-to roof. Extensions around the main door are common, creating a secondary outer doorway to help retain heat. The overall impression is of desperation and poverty.

Most houses had a vegetable garden, as is common in low-tech communities, but today the area around the town is taken up with additional cultivation. Fields down in the valley were abandoned long ago as too difficult to maintain, so most cereals and vegetables are now grown in small plots close to the town. Herds of sheep graze the higher ground, replacing less hardy animals which died off as the climate cooled. The change from modest agriculture to subsistence farming was gradual but absorbed most of the resources Pagaton had available and is not really sufficient to support the population. Grain arrives by train every few days, imported through the starport/maritime port from those areas where it is still easy to grow.

People the Travellers encounter are tough and stoic, with a pride that makes it difficult to tolerate know-it-all outsiders or accept anything that looks like charity. Pagaton's wildlife has suffered as much as crops, so there has been no move towards hunting as a replacement for farming. In short, the town of Respis is obviously doomed but will fade away slowly. It will be many miserable years before the last residents finally pack up and leave.

The town of Respis lies about halfway up the side of a shallow valley, with the land rising more steeply to the north-east. A series of ridges lies to the east, with the rail line running between them. A higher ridge to the north-east is partially screened by a scraggy forest of pine-like trees. The land falls away to the valley floor southwards. Patchy snow and areas of slush and ice are common year-round, with heavy snowfall in the winter. The town is partially sheltered by a ridge to the west, through which a cutting was driven long ago. Most trains are fitted with a snowplough but in winter the cutting becomes impassable unless constantly dug out.

DERELICT STATION (1)

The railway is a single line, with a passing loop to the west of town. In its heyday the town had platforms on both sides of the track, with the north one used for passengers. This was a comfortable, stone-constructed building long ago but has since collapsed and been plundered for materials. Little is left but the decaying remains of the concrete platform and a mound of snow-covered debris. There was once a metal footbridge at the eastern end of the platform but it is long gone, with only rusted stumps of the supports surviving.

SURVIVING PLATFORM (2)

The southern platform was originally intended mainly for goods and survives out of necessity. Passenger facilities are non-existent and the old loading gear has been replaced by a wood-fired steam crane and conveyor belt. This leads into the upper level of the granary behind the platform.

GRANARY (3)

The granary is a much-repaired stone building used to store cereals and other foodstuffs. Facilities are minimal; this is a storage area only. Offices and similarly unnecessary areas were allowed to decay or plundered for their resources long ago. The western end of the building has a tall grain elevator which connects to the station conveyor.

NORTH SIDE (4)

The north side of the town is mostly abandoned. A few stubborn householders keep their homes patched with materials from the least derelict others. These are mostly in a narrow strip at the very northern edge of town and their inhabitants are mainly shepherds and loggers operating on the north side of the railway tracks. The rest of the area is a mess of collapsed buildings and mounds of debris with a few semi-intact structures. This would be a treacherous place to try to land a spacecraft but that might not be apparent from the air.

SOUTH SIDE (5)

Most of the town's 200 or so inhabitants live on the south side of the railway. The majority are small-scale farmers, with a handful of businesses here and there. The only stone building is the town smithy; everything else is made of wood.

COLD MARSH (6)

The river that once flowed along the bottom of the valley is now a sluggish, half-frozen marsh which broadens into a shallow lake, or a collection of iced-over ponds, depending on the temperature. The lower part of the valley can be hazardous, especially where mud or water is covered by thin ice.

LOWER EAST VALLEY (7)

The eastern part of the valley was once the best arable land. The remains of farms and steads can still be made out among the scraggy grass and stands of bushes. Near the town, the land is cultivated with hardier crops than once grew here, whilst the more distant parts have become wild and are used for sheep grazing.

UPPER VALLEY (8)

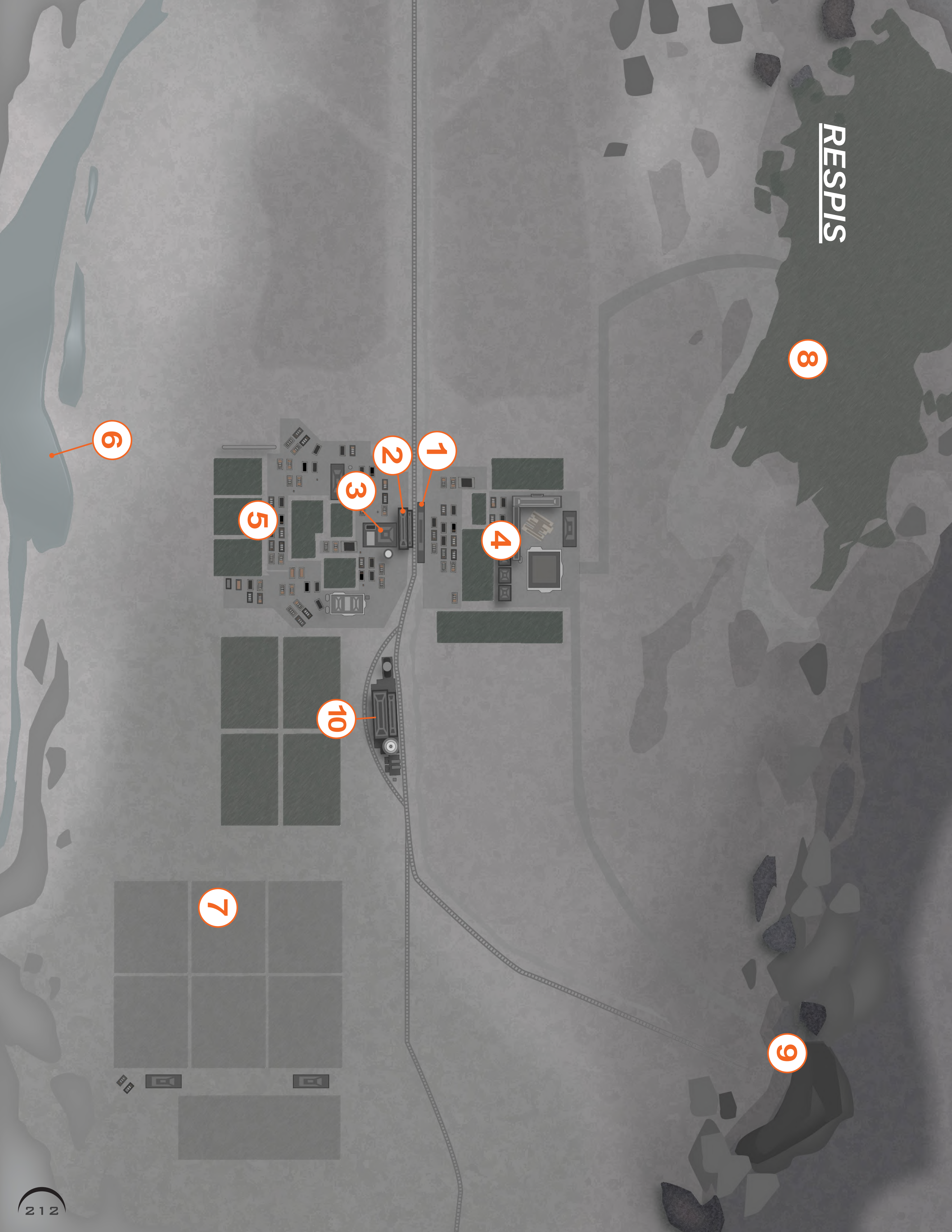
The upper valley slopes gently for some distance, then rises more steeply in a manner suggesting ancient glaciation in the area. Forest has reclaimed the upper slopes and is encroaching downward into the grazing lands. Most of the town's wood comes from this forest.

RESPIS HIGH RIDGE (9)

The high ridge is the tallest of a series which rise towards the eastern end of the valley. Most are unremarkable but the high ridge was once the site of a copper mine. The rail tracks to and from it was still passable, although in a few decades the track bed will have degraded too much to be useable. The line ends at the old mine site, where a few buildings still stand. Useable machinery was removed decades ago.

THE RAIL YARD (10)

The single-line railway through town has a wide passing loop to allow trains moving in opposite directions to pass one another. It has not been used in years and the small maintenance building associated with it became unnecessary around the same time. Nevertheless, the stone-built structure is in good order. It has been maintained by its owner/resident since she bought it around 30 years ago. Known locally by her current identity of Dreya Elinnier, Mercedes Karamaka has lived on Pagaton for longer than this but relocated from the starport region when it became a target in the world's increasingly severe conflicts.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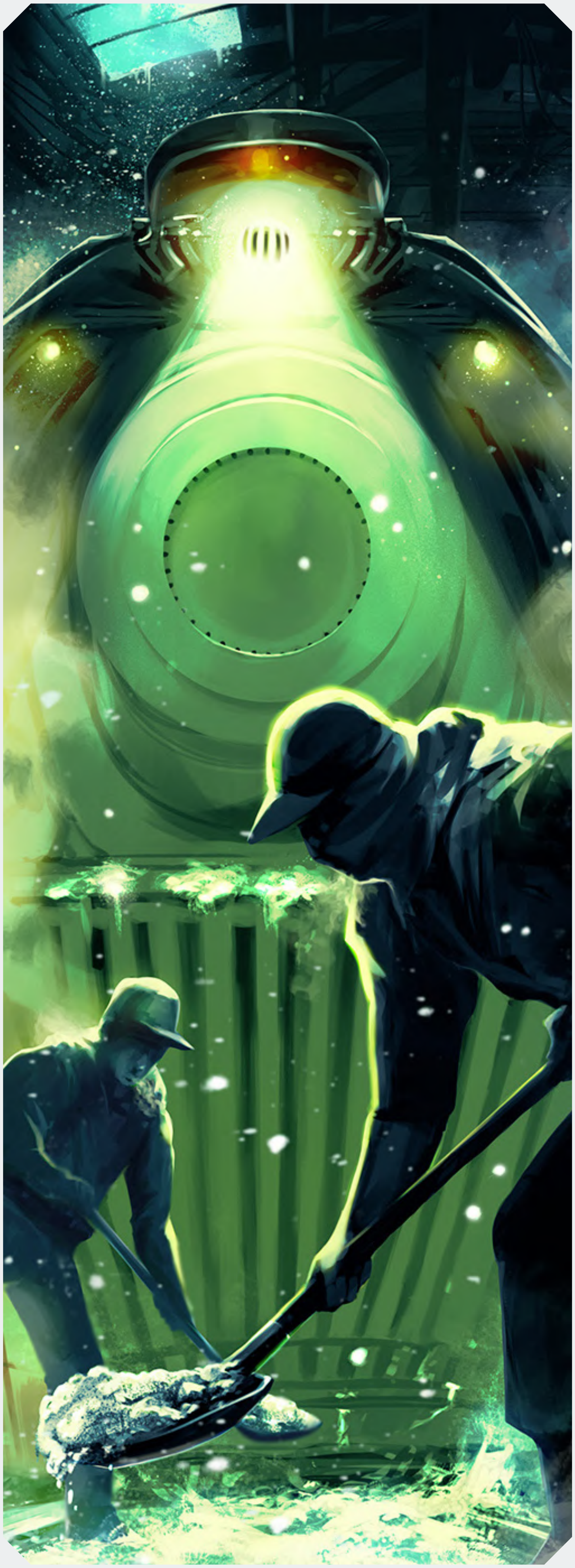
ARRIVING AT RESPIS

The Travellers might reach Respis one of a few ways. Travelling by ground vehicle, driving parallel to the rail line, is doing it the hard way but other than being a long cross-country drive there are no undue hazards. Trains run the length of the island every few hours, so getting one will be easy enough. They are not particularly comfortable but again there are no real hazards. Travellers who use a starship, small craft or grav vehicle can reach the town easily and need only contend with the problem of where to land. With no prepared landing area there is always a risk of hitting soft ground or an undetected obstacle. A careful pilot can minimise this.

New arrivals will elicit a minimal response from the townsfolk. Mercedes (Dreya) receives offworld visitors from time-to-time, but otherwise few people stop at Respis. Anyone asking about Mercedes gets a blank look but the only person they would be likely to want to see is Dreya so the Travellers will be directed to her. The townsfolk do not know where she came from and assume she is a starfarer who wanted to settle down and avoid some aspect of her past. They do not ask what that might be and judge Dreya for what she has been – a good friend to the town.

Dreya arrived on a train about 30 years ago and paid some of the locals to help her fix up the railway maintenance buildings. Not long after that she moved her own train into it. Dreya's train rarely leaves the area but makes frequent forays up and down the local line clearing snow. In addition to the usual plough she has rigged up a hot-air blower – dangerously hot air in fact – on the locomotive. This makes keeping the cutting clear much easier. Dreya also subsidises grain imports and pays for materials to make necessary repairs to the town's machinery. The locals are aware their town would die without her and are protective towards her even if she has never made any effort to develop friendships. Overall, Dreya is seen as a mysterious benefactor who just wants to be left alone and the townsfolk are happy with that arrangement.



MERCEDES

Mercedes Karamaka, locally known as Dreya Elinnier, lives in the railway maintenance building. Most of the structure is taken up with its main function, looking after railway locomotives and rolling stock. The line runs over a turntable and into the shed through its open front, which also allows snow to blow in. The sides and rear are closed off, with gantries for cranes running over the top of the tracks. Mercedes' own train occupies the front part of the shed, with the rest of the track empty. Her abode is above the gantries, taking over the space once occupied by offices. It is accessed by way of a steep stairway up each of the building's long-side internal walls.

MERCEDES' HOME

The maintenance structure looks the same as it always did but it has been heavily modified with materials quietly brought in by Mercedes over the years. The floor and walls are reinforced with military-grade ceramic/metal alloy plate; lightweight but extremely tough. This was mainly for strength and insulation but it has had the side effect of making the upper part of the structure more or less bulletproof. Essentially, the living space is encased in armour of Protection +35, with interior walls offering Protection +20. Windows are also made from armoured ceramic equivalent in protection to the exterior walls. This is not paranoia on Mercedes' part; people have tried to kill her over the years and she knows that someday someone may come for her.

Mercedes essentially lives in an armoured box, with its own starship-grade heating and recycling system. A gantry/balcony runs across the front and back of the structure, with two doors giving access at each end. At the front of her home these lead into corridors that run the length of the building. At the rear, the doors lead into large storage chambers. These are rather chilly but still warmer than outside in the open-ended maintenance building. The rest of Mercedes' home is well lit, warm and controlled by a starship-type environmental system.

Very few of the locals have ever seen the inside of Mercedes' home. This is partly to conceal how advanced her dwelling is compared to the tumbledown hovels of the local population and partly because Mercedes feels she has nothing in common with those people. She is willing to help out with food and track-clearance but it might cause complications if the locals knew what she had at her disposal. Better to keep her distance, she decided long ago. After all, she can re-join starfaring society at any time. She has come close on several occasions but thus far has decided to remain on Pagaton until she has solved her current set of theoretical problems.

GUEST RECEPTION (1)

Mercedes maintains a large reception/lounge area to entertain her few guests. It is well-furnished and comfortable, although it is rarely used. Occasionally someone comes to visit, after which the room might be shut up again for months or even years. Mercedes rarely goes in there when she does not have company, trusting her household cleaning robots to keep it ready for use. The overall effect is rather sad and sterile; Mercedes has lived apart from the rest of the universe for a very long time.

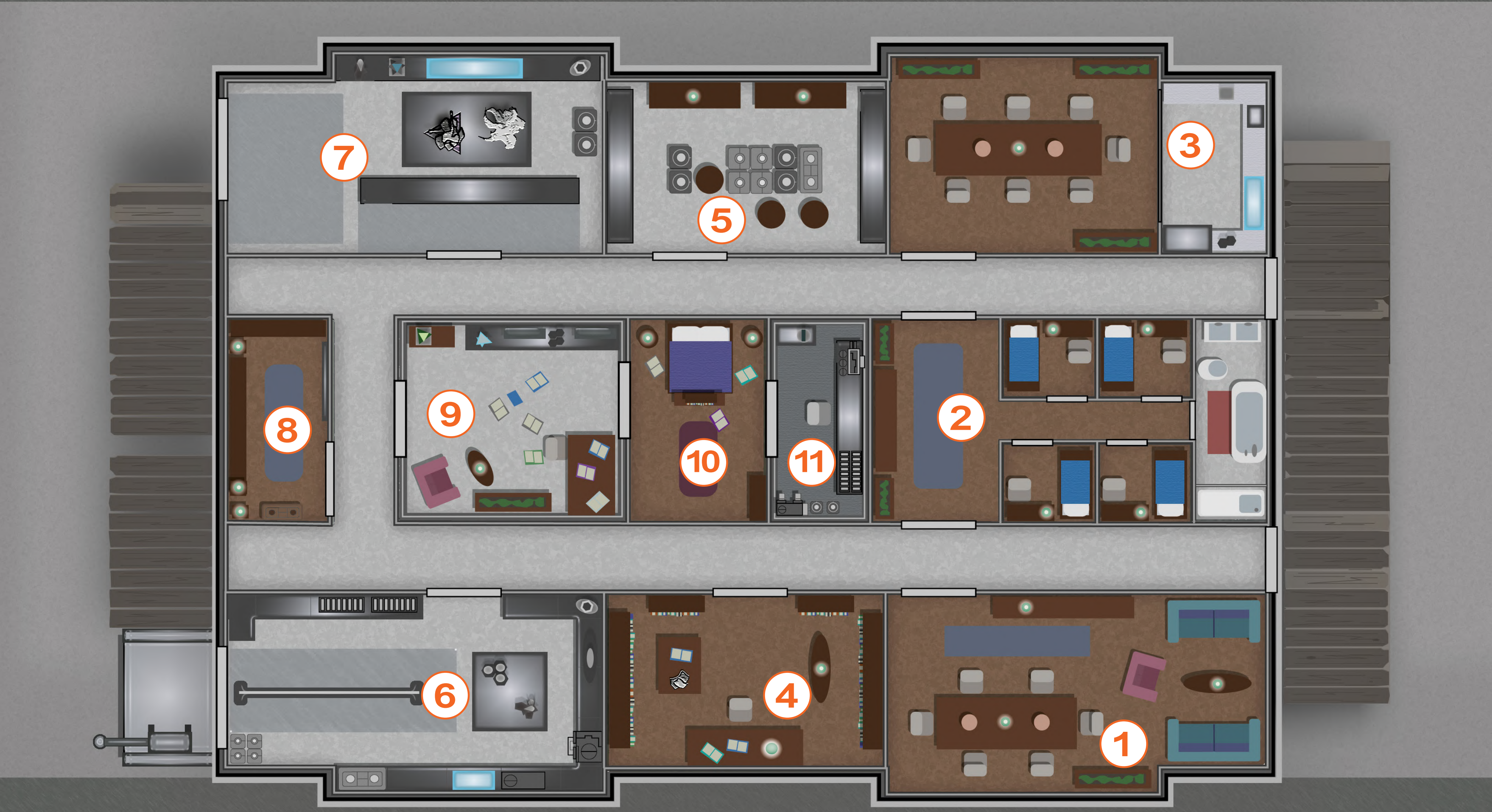
GUEST ACCOMMODATION (2)

This large chamber is subdivided into four small guest bedrooms plus a storage area at each end. This arrangement dates from a time when Mercedes expected to get more visitors than she currently does. She does not go in these rooms very often. They are kept meticulously tidy by the household robots but without any personal effects or even little touches like a picture or holo-display the accommodation is no more welcoming than the blandest corporate hotel. Despite this, these are the most comfortable rooms on the planet other than Mercedes' own bedroom.

KITCHEN/DINING AREA (3)

Mercedes' home has a well-appointed kitchen segregated from the dining area by a sliding screen. She can entertain in style if she has guests and rather likes doing so. She is a terrible cook but the largely robotic kitchen/galley system came from an advanced passenger liner and has an extensive repertoire. Even with local produce it is capable of producing excellent meals. When there are no guests – which is most of the time – the kitchen robotics are usually employed making packaged meals for the townsfolk.

MERCEDES' HOME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This area is used by Mercedes every day and is a much more welcoming space than the guest rooms and lounge. There are holos on the walls depicting alien landscapes and starships, including one of the scout ship *Baleveny* with her crew standing on the cargo ramp. This is the item of greatest personal significance to Mercedes, even more so than her books. She could make a new holo from backed up data but this is the original, framed in real wood many decades ago. There are other pictures of other ships but they have no real significance to Mercedes.

WRITING ROOM/LIBRARY (4)

Mercedes has an extensive library of paper books some of which are very well worn and clearly loved. Her writing desk is covered in scraps of paper with notes scribbled on them and she has a sheaf of handwritten text. She is currently working on a project tentatively titled: 'Mad Captain Maddox – A Biography in Verse'. It is every bit as badly written as *Twilight's Peak* and the writing is virtually impossible to decipher. Mercedes has a state-of-the-art handwriting-to-text system and even it struggles at times.

Among the reams and reams of paper notes are a great many drawings. Some are merely doodles or abstracts created when Mercedes' concentration was elsewhere, whilst others represent a credible attempt to become an artist. Mercedes is getting to be quite good at depicting local scenery and daily life. One set charts what she imagines the town would have been like a few hundred years ago, gradually collapsing into ruin as the weather changed. From a midpoint drawn from life, Mercedes continues her artistic journey into the future, finishing with a snow scene in which the town and the rail line are nothing more than humps of rubble.

There are books on a great many subjects, since Mercedes has collected paper books just for the sake of it. Most of the Ancients-related data contained in the books has been transferred to electronic storage and there are backups elsewhere. The books are, for the most part, a pleasant hobby to be pursued alongside the real work of seeking answers to the mysteries of the Ancients. Mercedes does not know it but she is close.

Ever since the incident at Twilight's Peak, Mercedes has been collecting information on the Ancients. Much of it is the usual nonsense but she has meticulously graded the likely reliability of any given piece of information, cross-referenced everything and gradually eliminated much of the noise. She feeds every single 'fact' into her giant database of everything and runs the same process over and over. Very occasionally this results in a previously discredited piece of information coming back to life but more commonly it eliminates nonsense made up by questionable sources. What is left may not be the truth but there is a picture to be discerned from it.

This picture alarms and frightens Mercedes, to the point where she has devoted her time almost exclusively to figuring it all out. Someone else coming to her pages of scribbled notes and gigantic data files might never even find the threads but Mercedes has been building up a picture for decades. She knows, and presumes to be true, a great many specific facts about certain Ancients sites and the activities they carried out there. She has identified the work of several individuals or factions. Her conclusions – as they are to date – are listed on page 220.

KITCHEN STORES (5)

Mercedes' kitchen stores are a mix of offworld and local ingredients preserved mainly by cryogenic freezing, pre-packaged starship-type rations and meals her galley robot has put together. The stores area is subdivided according to preservation type but beyond this there seems to be little system to how anything is stored. A quick foray in search of a snack can become something of an adventure.

HEAVY ITEM STORES (6)

Large and bulky items are stored in this chamber, such as sections of ceramic/metal plate and cutting/welding equipment to work it with. Outside the rear door is a hoist for getting such items up and down, which has been modified to operate as a rather hazardous personnel lift at need. Some of the objects in this chamber are very bulky indeed, such as a complete axle/wheel assembly from a railway car. There are workbenches around the outer walls and a hoist/frame for holding anything from a vacc suit.

SMALL ITEM STORES/WORKSHOP (7)

This area is set up as a small workshop for mechanical and electronic work. There are bits and pieces of unfinished projects, half-dismantled robots and a few highly unusual objects that seem to have no function. They are in fact abstract statues thrown together whilst Mercedes is thinking about something complex. This is part of what she calls her deep-thought process; essentially she lets her subconscious work through a problem whilst her hands do whatever they like. Most of the statues she has produced this way get broken up but some are pleasing or disturbing enough that she has kept them as trophies of a complex problem solved.

CLOTHING STORES (8)

This large walk-in storage area is used for clothing and related items. There is little more order to it than the kitchen stores, with a couple of exceptions. Mercedes has a couple of vacc suits stored here, which are given plenty of room and well looked after. One is very old and no longer used but still in working order. It is a standard-issue Scout Service suit. The other is more modern and is Mercedes' current-use suit. The rest of the storage area contains an assortment of heavy cold-weather clothing, boots and associated items. Most of it has not been worn for a long time, as Mercedes has a favourite coat and rarely wears anything different when she ventures outside.

MERCEDES' LIVING AREA (9)

Mercedes had her home constructed for security and protection. Her personal chambers are right in the middle, with a heavily reinforced floor and roof. The living area is comfortably untidy, with books lying around on every flat surface. There is a gun rack containing two autopistols, a combat shotgun and a semi-automatic rifle. It is coded to Mercedes' touch. She has not needed a weapon in years but recognises that could change at any time.

Travellers are unlikely to be invited into the personal living area for social reasons but would be permitted to shelter there if the building were to be attacked. Otherwise, Mercedes reserves her personal living space for the few real friends she has, or for guests she wants to think are numbered among them. There are a few artefacts on shelves around the walls but nothing powerful. Most items are apparently inert, such as what appears to be a small statuette of a Vargr and Droyne holding aloft a staff-like device. Mercedes has never been able to discern any function other than looking impressive. This is true of all objects in this chamber; she keeps functional items aboard her ship and devices she might need in the inner secure chamber.

MERCEDES' BEDCHAMBER (10)

Mercedes' bedchamber is as untidy as her living space, despite the best efforts of a dedicated robot. Her bedchamber is set up to the specification of a luxury liner and despite years of wear it is still elegant in a clean and uncomplicated style. Some of the clothes in the wardrobes are trophies or reminders of previous identities; a junior naval officer's uniform, a ball gown, formal academic dress from the University of Regina. Most of the clothes are comfortable home-wear or working dress for when Mercedes ventures outside. Her stash of anagathic drugs is kept in a carry-case in the bottom of one of the wardrobes.

INNER SECURE CHAMBER (10)

Accessible only through Mercedes' living spaces, the secure chamber contains life support machinery but, curiously perhaps, no obvious power generation equipment. There are ready-racks for items Mercedes might need: her environment suit and disintegrator weapon. A small personal computer contains backups of all her work and can be removed from its mount in seconds. Normally it serves as a communications hub, monitoring starport chatter and the status of Mercedes' own starship, as well as sending backups of her work to the ship on a regular basis.

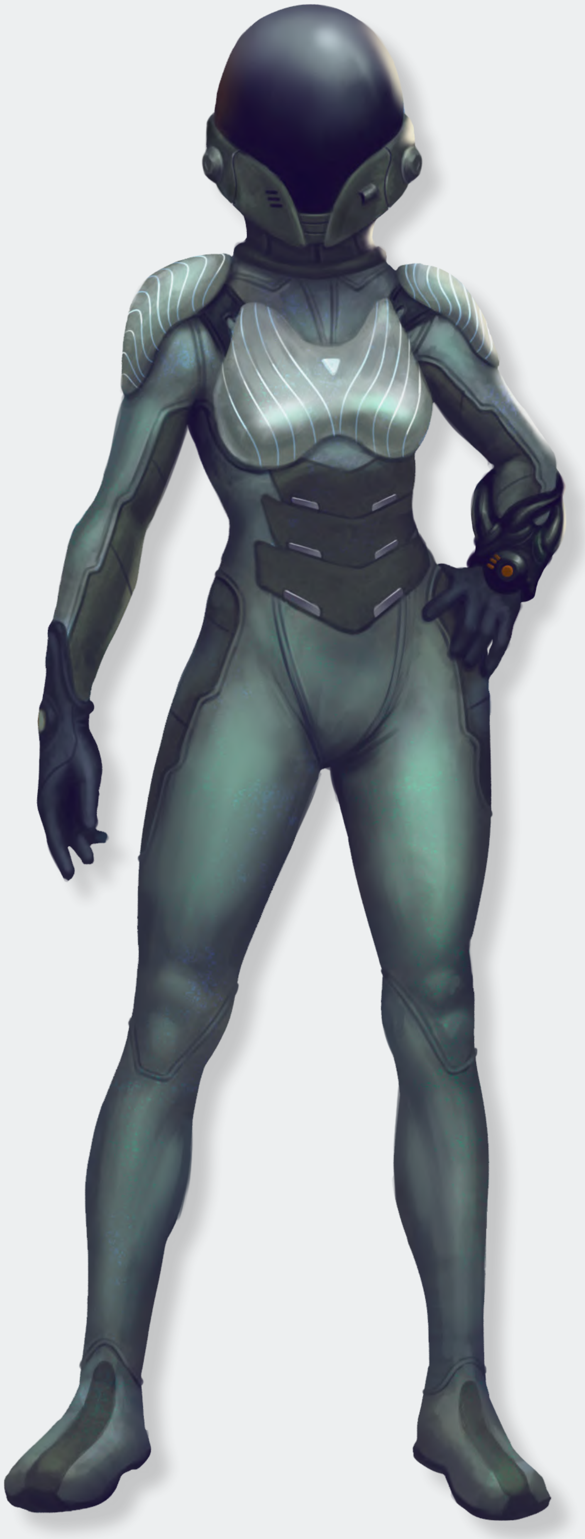
If the Travellers get access or Mercedes feels the need, they will find out how the building is powered. In a custom-built mounting on the side of the life support equipment is a smooth ovoid of alien-looking metal. A rather ugly contrivance has been attached to each end, with heavy-duty power cables running into the building's power system. The whole structure is run off a battery Mercedes retrieved a century ago at Twilight's Peak.

MERCEDES' DISINTEGRATOR

This takes the form of a wristband covering her left forearm, with flexible fibres attached to the back of her left hand. The graceful curves of the Ancients device contrast the electronic device she has fitted to allow her to control the weapon. This is accomplished by finger movement and tension in the hand; Mercedes operates rather than fires her weapon. It has an absolute maximum range of 122.74 metres according to her tests and causes the molecules making up matter to dissociate in a 12.43 centimetre radius around the target point. The effect is patchy and a little unpredictable; damage against personnel is 1Dx1D but a sustained disintegrator effect can be used to cut through an obstruction. Targeting empty air causes a brilliant lightshow of flashes and small electrical discharges which can obscure sighting for a moment or cause a distraction. The weapon can deliver 68 'shots' or 41 seconds of continuous cutting before requiring a lengthy recharge.

MERCEDES' ENVIRONMENT SUIT

Mercedes' suit is a rebuilt patchwork of several others, using a mix of materials from Ancients-era suits with supporting equipment. The result is a dull grey coverall which seems to shift between greenish and blueish hues in an uneven and unpredictable manner. It is impervious to gas and will provide vacuum protection if paired with a helmet. This is the equivalent of a human combat environment suit, with added protection in the form of a field generated around the user upon command. This will absorb 2D points of damage from energy weapons, determined each time the suit is struck. Protection against normal heat and cold – from hot desert to arctic conditions – is complete so long as the suit has power. Mercedes keeps it charged from the Ancients battery she possesses. The suit's internal power source is good for at least six hours and probably a lot longer; Mercedes has never tested its limits.



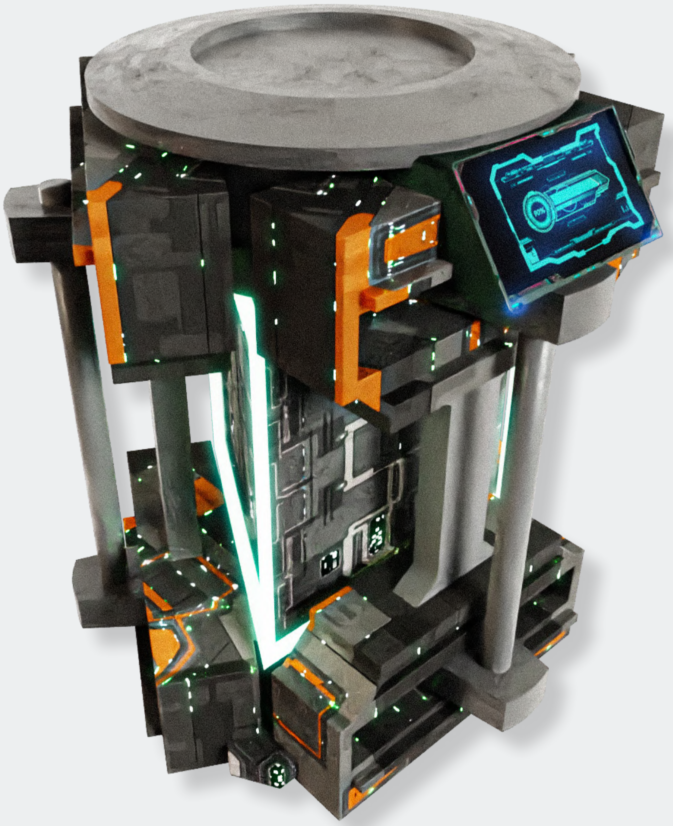
Weapon	TL	Range	Damage	Kg	Cost	Magazine	Power Pack Cost	Traits
Disintegrator	15+	30.68m	1Dx1D	1	Priceless	68	—	Zero-G

Armour Type	Protection	TL	Rad	Kg	Cost	Required Skill
Ancients Environment Suit	+6	15+	120	3	Priceless	None

MERCEDES' ANTIMATTER BATTERY

The antimatter battery Mercedes retrieved from Twilight's Peak delivers the equivalent of 1 Power continuously. She has been using it ever since she was able to link it with cables about 90 years ago, although she does turn it off when she leaves the planet. Mercedes does not know for how much longer the battery will operate but there is no sign of its output wavering or being reduced. Her best guess is a couple more decades. Whether these devices are disposable or could be recharged is beyond her knowledge but she correctly suspects that breaching one might be disastrous. The device has Protection +12 and 4 hits. When these are gone it will rupture, causing an antimatter event lasting 2D rounds. Each round, everything within 1D+4 metres suffers 3D damage. 12 hits in a single penetrating strike causes a full rupture; blast radius will be 2D+6 metres, within which everything suffers 2DD damage.

Item	TL	Kg	Cost
Antimatter Battery	?	4	Priceless



MERCEDES' ESCAPE PLAN

Mercedes has always known that she might need to leave Pagaton in a hurry. She has a starship hidden in an old copper mine to the north-east and an unusual way of getting to it. In the railway maintenance shed is Mercedes' personal train, which she uses to get to the mine on the rare occasions she ventures offworld. The locomotive is, outwardly at least, typical of local designs. However, whilst it has a tender full of cordwood for appearance, the power source is a set of hydrogen fuel cells and a powerful heater system installed where the firebox would normally be.

The locomotive has a set of long tubes fitted to its sides, ending just above the prow of the large snowplough blade which has also been fitted. These tubes blast hot air when the driver desires, making a dreadful noise and scattering loose snow. Ice and thickly packed snow can be melted quickly. The jet of hot air poses a threat to anyone in front of it – within five metres it will cause 1D damage per round, and D3 damage out to ten metres. Beyond this point it is unpleasantly warm, usually creating a steam cloud. The device is well-loved by the local population as it makes clearing the rail line easy.

The rest of the train consists of a wood and water tender plus three converted cargo vans. These remain outwardly the same as before conversion but have been reinforced with the same material as Mercedes' home. Anyone inside a car has Protection +35 between them and any incoming damage, although it would be necessary to open a door to shoot out. The first car contains a simple living space with a bunk, fresher and kitchenette. There is a gun rack containing a standard laser carbine and an autopistol. The carbine has a curious device fitted to the muzzle. When in place it acts as a beam diffuser, allowing the weapon to be used for ice clearance at a distance. Mercedes sometimes has to remove overhanging ice and finds this method preferable to getting close. If the diffuser is removed, the weapon functions as normal. The other two cars are for transporting whatever Mercedes thinks she might need or has brought home. They are usually empty except for racks and boxes.

Mercedes does not leave town more than a few times a year and her trips are usually to the starport. She comes back with ingredients and starship rations, and dispenses meal packs to the townsfolk when she gets home. Seeing her firing up the train is one of the few causes for optimism in this dying town and whilst nobody will say it, once Mercedes has gone the place will become unviable in short order. However, Mercedes knows that the day is coming and is prepared.

The spur line up to the mine is covered in snow but can be traversed easily enough with the assistance of the snowplough and the hot air blowers. The entrance to the mine is covered by a retractable sheet-metal door designed to resemble the surrounding rock and to conceal the fact that the entrance has been widened to accommodate a small starship. This is a standard scout/courier, little different from *Garnette* other than by way of its anonymity. The ship is ready to fly and can be powered up by remote signal.

All Mercedes has to do is get to the ship and fly away. Thus her escape plan in the event of disaster is to grab the few items she cannot bear to part with, take her disintegrator and fight her way to the train. A short ride later she can be airborne, with copies of her work in the ship's computer and a few years' worth of anagathic drugs in the locker. She can set up somewhere else if she likes but in her heart of hearts Mercedes knows that if she is forced to leave Pagaton she will return to mobile Ancients hunting for a few years at least.

MERCEDES KARAMAKA

If the Travellers ask about Mercedes they find that nobody in town knows the name but everyone knows who Dreya Elinnier is. She is the only person offworlders would want to see, so the Travellers will be directed to her abode. She has a good set of sensors and cameras, and cannot possibly miss the arrival of a spacecraft or grav vehicle. By this point she may or may not know who the Travellers are. If she has heard of them, Mercedes is likely to welcome the Travellers and trust them as far as she trusts anyone. If not, she will be more guarded and initially meet with the Travellers outside her home. Her preferred mode of contact is to call the Travellers on the local comms channel – nobody else in town has a comm so it will not be hard to make contact – and to set up a meeting at the southern platform of the railway station.

INITIAL MEETING

Mercedes is not paranoid but knows dangerous things and is aware there are organisations that would like to interrogate someone like her. She has a network of contacts among the Ancients Hunter community, mainly Wannabees who do not know who they are sending information to. These people have been instructed to watch out for certain indicators that might suggest a group is onto something worth talking about or are acting on behalf of Omicron Division. She is likely to have some idea who the Travellers are and what they stand for by the time they arrive. All the same, she is cautious.

Mercedes has spent many years being a chameleon or a 'grey person'; someone easily missed or passed over. She will not initially acknowledge her real name, not least as the locals know her as Dreya Elinnier. The Travellers will have to convince her of their sincerity and trustworthiness.

If the Travellers mention Vlen, that is a point in their favour… mostly. Mercedes has met him a few times over the decades and he knows where she lives. The fact that Omicron Division have not come calling in all that time suggests he is not in league with them but all the same Mercedes does not trust Vlen. He is pleasant enough and has good knowledge but she senses he has an agenda of which she is not aware. She is correct in this, as will become apparent in *Secrets of the Ancients*.

Mentioning other members of 'the community' can have variable effects. Anyone who speaks highly of someone Mercedes thinks is a fraud will quickly be discounted but she is fond of Blanca and Bernadatta's crew. Indeed, she loaned *Garnette* to Bernadatta and gave her the manuscript of *Twilight's Peak*. News of her death will hit Mercedes hard and she will press for information. Mercedes did not really know Sorrel but can offer some insight into what might have happened if the Travellers explain the situation.

If the Travellers arrived in *Garnette,* Mercedes is intrigued and alarmed at first but if their story of how they got the ship rings true she will rapidly decide to trust them. However it happens, the Travellers will have to convince Mercedes they are worthwhile contacts and not in league with Omicron Division. How they do this is up to them. The Referee should encourage the Travellers to tell their tale whilst standing around in the snow, until Mercedes makes up her mind and invites them inside where it is a lot warmer.

TALKING WITH MERCEDES

Interacting with Mercedes should not be an information dump. She has a great many questions of her own and meeting her represents an opportunity for the Referee to lead the Travellers to their own conclusions. The meeting will take the form of a back-and-forth conversation in which the Travellers will learn some important truths.

Mercedes will expound her theory about the Ancients; that they were a group or groups within a larger and more mundane starfaring culture. She believes the average person in the Ancients era was very ordinary, with access to wondrous technology but no real understanding of it. Her analogy is that Ancients society might be much like modern Imperial life – the Duchess of Mora can accomplish great things with the tools at her disposal and her chief scientists understand matters of complex science but the average person working in retail or customer service does not know how the grav-buses work.

Mercedes also wants to hear what the Travellers think about the Ancients. She will debate their assumptions and conclusions without being derisive and listen to what they say on the subject. This is an opportunity for the Travellers to get their thoughts in order or to gain a new perspective on the subject. Along the way Mercedes mentions Omicron Division. Her impression of them is that they are dedicated defenders of the Imperium against the Ancients threat, which she is absolutely sure is real. However, this does not automatically make them the ‘good guys’. Omicron Division seizes artefacts and presumably tries to weaponise them against the Ancients threat but they could be used against other threats besides. Their methods are less than subtle as well; they will take by force whatever they think they need and Mercedes is aware of several instances of extreme collateral damage.

Omicron Division is, at least according to Mercedes, a dangerous foe and a worse ally. As far as they are concerned there is their way and nothing else. A zealot with a sledgehammer, as she calls them. They might be necessary to the defence of Humaniti and other species against a resurgent Ancients threat but the enemy of an enemy is a co-belligerent and nothing more. Omicron Division will use people like the Travellers and cast them aside as expendable if it is more convenient than supporting them. Agreements are always one-sided and honoured only as long as they benefit the Division. Mercedes knew people who joined Omicron Division or became collateral victims. Some were not even given the chance to hand over the artefacts they had found.

As to the Ancients Threat, Mercedes is absolutely sure it exists. The Ancients did not disappear completely. They are out there somewhere, perhaps hiding and perhaps doing something incomprehensible. When they decide to return they will do so and the people of Charted Space will obey them or be punished. The Imperium and Omicron Division may not be perfect but they are at least some form of opposition to enslavement by arrogant gods.

If asked how she knows all this, Mercedes will finally tell the Travellers about Twilight’s Peak. The story is real, although it contains one or two blatant lies. She and her companions found a functional Ancients base and entered. They observed wonders and they retrieved a few artefacts. They always intended to return when the time was right, but never did. She was worried that a second visit might lead Omicron Division to it.

Her companions are long dead now and Mercedes has come to the conclusion it is time to go to Twilight’s Peak. She is close, she thinks, to discerning the pattern of what is happening regarding the Ancients. Just a little more data will help her unravel the mystery… where are they and when will they return? The risk of Omicron Division getting control of the Ancients base is inconsequential compared to what will happen if the Ancients regain control of it. So, her plan is to go there with the Travellers and investigate. She will stay there indefinitely to research it and perhaps gain control of its systems. If the Ancients return they will find their fortress held against them.

Whilst Mercedes is expounding her plan, a piece of information arrives. The liner *Glisten Pearl* has entered orbit and launched a subordinate craft. Mercedes is aware of this from routine monitoring of the starport comms chatter. The Travellers may have taken similar measures but even if not Mercedes will alert them. The liner is a known Omicron Division asset – a fact that may surprise the Travellers – and it appears to be headed for Respis. There can be only one reason for that.

Omicron Division is coming and they will not be subtle. They will certainly try to capture Mercedes for interrogation and might consider the Travellers expendable. In short, it is time to leave. Mercedes gathers up her must-have belongings and remotely activates the power cells in her train. She tells the Travellers she has a ship and can reach it if she leaves quickly. After that there is something she must do. They should go to Twilight’s Peak, gain entry and… well, do the right thing. She will join them as soon as she can and they will explore the wonders of an active Ancients base together.

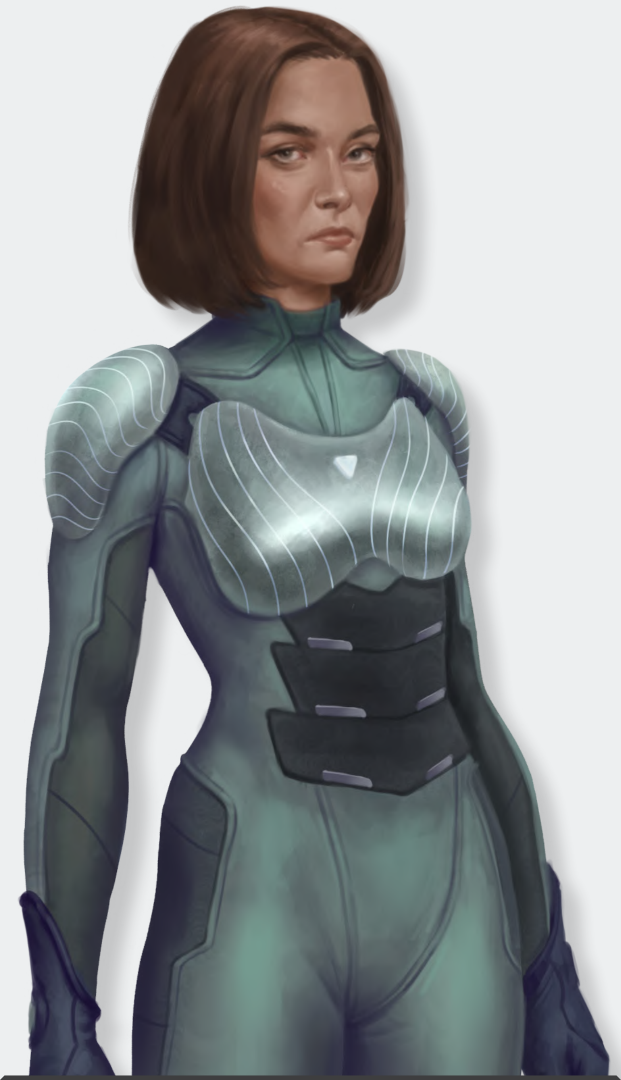
If the Travellers ask where Twilight's Peak is, Mercedes gives them a distinctly disappointed look and announces: 'Ancient stony spike, cold stars beyond. Eternal light on your face, limitless dark behind… big mountain, Lydia, twilight zone. Can't miss it.' Even if the Travellers have figured out where the mountain is, Mercedes gives them one important piece of information: 'You get in through fissures at the base of the mountain. Land in the crater and head directly towards the tallest peak.' She has time for little more. Omicron Division are closing in and she must leave. Even if they were defeated, the Division knows where Mercedes has been for the past few decades. This location is compromised and the only option is relocation.

MERCEDES KARAMAKA

Mercedes Karamaka has lived several lives, in the sense that each of her identities was a long-term prospect. Some were maintained whilst she used another as her primary, whilst others were allowed to fade away. Her current incarnation as Dreya Elinnier has been around for nearly 40 years in one form or another. Searching records will eventually turn up a nondescript sort of character who made a living as a courier and small-cargo pilot before retiring to an unknown location. It would be possible to infer a possible smuggling connection but there is nothing about this identity that would provoke a search on the off-chance.

In fact Mercedes was in the Scout Service before finding Twilight's Peak and funded all her activities ever since using the artefacts she found there. She has considered going back but worries about leading others to the location or triggering something. This is a valid suspicion, as the Travellers will find out sooner or later. In the interim Mercedes has been trying to find out everything she can about the Ancients and to piece it together. She is certain that at least some of the Ancients still exist and that they may come back to this region of space someday. In that, she is also correct.

In her identity as Dreya Elinnier, Mercedes is reserved and professional. Her actual personality is much warmer and she is a loyal friend to those she deems worth it. Despite, or perhaps because of, a lifetime piecing together distorted truths and discerning falsehoods, Mercedes has a well-developed respect for the truth. She respects those who know the boundaries of their knowledge and are willing to admit what they do not know. Those who extrapolate into the realms of fantasy are beneath her contempt, as are the so-called Ancients Hunters who just make stuff up to sound important.



MERCEDES KARAMAKA

SPECIES	GENDER	AGE
—	Female	46

TRAITS			—	SKILLS
STR	7	INT	12	Admin 2, Astrogator 1, Diplomat 1, Electronics (computers) 2, Electronics (sensors) 4, Gun Combat (energy) 1, Gun Combat (slug) 2, Investigate 5, Jack-of-all-Trades 2, Leadership 1, Melee (unarmed) 1, Pilot 2, Science (archaeology) 2, Science (history) 3, Steward 2, Vacc Suit 3
DEX	8	EDU	11	
END	6	SOC	7	

WEAPONS:	Disintegrator (1Dx1D, Zero-G)
ARMOUR:	Environment Suit (+6)

Mercedes has stashes of equipment and money on other worlds and a change of identity waiting for her at some locations. Once she knows Pagaton is 'blown' her first priority is to become someone else and lose any pursuit or tail. After that she will head to Lydia to meet the Travellers or to take up residence in the Ancients base there. However, she will arrive too late to play a part in the exploration of the base or the showdown which follows. Upon witnessing the destruction of Twilight's Peak, Mercedes goes into hiding for a while and continues her work. The Travellers will meet her again in *Wrath of the Ancients*.

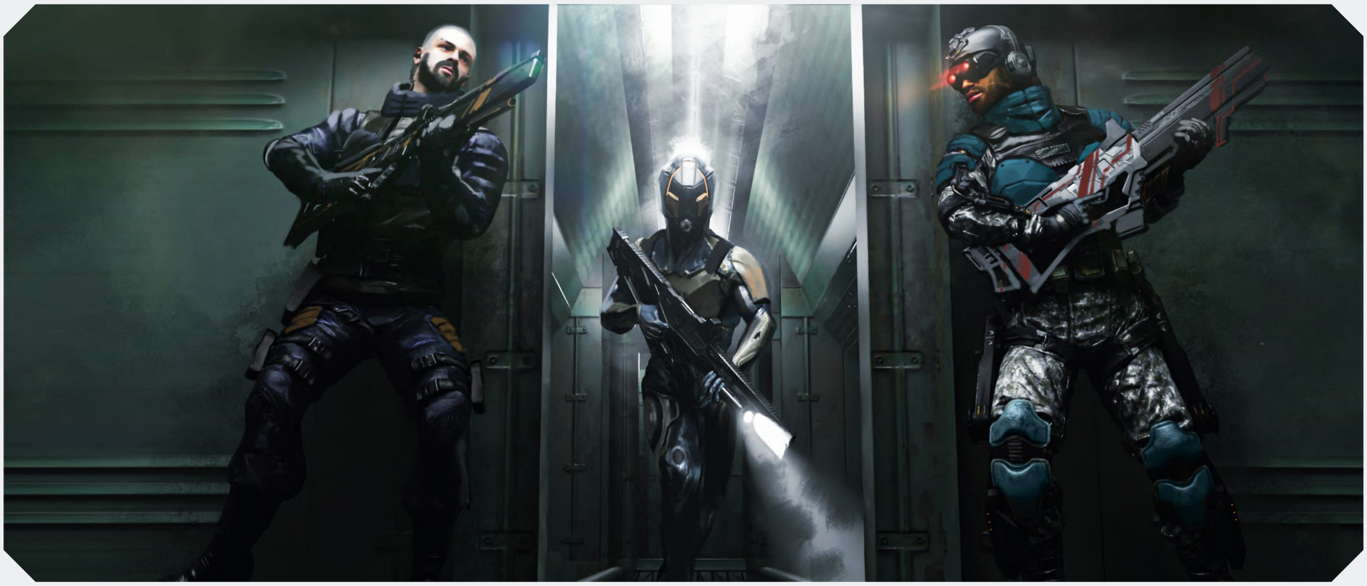
OMICRON DIVISION

The attention of Omicron Division has been drawn elsewhere, pulling their main assets away to the Trojan Reach. What is left is a few agents and intelligence-gathering vessels such as the liner *Glisten Pearl*. When the order came to seize Mercedes Karamaka, the local commander had to improvise a little. She hired a group of mercenaries to do the dirty work and sent them to Pagaton aboard the liner. In fact, nobody aboard *Glisten Pearl* knows exactly what they are dealing with. They have been ordered to pick up a Potential Threat/Asset named Dreya Elinnier using whatever means may be necessary and to consider bystanders expendable.

This is a standard order whenever Omicron Division feels it needs to use force but the actions taken are usually kept within sensible limits. Omicron Division is well aware that causing mayhem has long-term consequences and much prefers a clean 'pinch' or to get someone to cooperate either by coercion or incentives. However, in this case the Division was pushed for time and short of options, so it hired a 'direct action detachment' from a mercenary group named Delvin's Combateers. These personnel are not well-disciplined and enjoy chaos so long as they are not in much danger. In short, they are a bunch of trigger-happy yahoos serving for thrills as much as money.

The Combateers are a mildly notorious mercenary 'conglomerate', as they style themselves. They recruit anyone they can get, allowing personnel to form small teams without much direct oversight. Teams are then assigned to a leader as needed, creating detachments of what are essentially gunmen-for-hire rather than true mercenaries. By the usual definition, mercenary forces are well-organised and trained to be soldiers rather than thugs. The Combateers are the sort who give the 'merc trade' a bad name by fielding bands of semi-competent armed people who consider getting the job done a necessary step on the way to looting and thuggery.

Although they have a uniform and standardised equipment, the detachment about to land on Pagaton are little different to the usual militarised gang fielded by Devlin's Combateers. They are competent enough at basic tactics – optimised for action against ill-armed militia or civilians – and personal weapon handling but they consider orders to be something of an imposition. There is little mutual trust within the force. Thus, where a proper mercenary soldier would be willing to make a rush across the street, confident their comrades are providing cover, members of this detachment cannot be sure their support has not wandered off in search of something to steal and will always want someone else to take all the risks.



Despite this, the detachment will broadly follow a reasonable plan. There are 10 personnel aboard the launch, who will deploy as two teams and three individuals. Team 1 consists of four personnel tasked with finding and grabbing the target. If they can grab a local they will beat the location out of them. In the interim they will go house-to-house, not initially realising the railway maintenance shed is a dwelling. Team 2 consists of three personnel acting as 'backstop' for team 1. They will attempt to secure any spacecraft or vehicles, ideally by hiding in ambush positions nearby. If team 1 gets into trouble team 2 might go to their assistance but cooperation is rather loose.

Team 1 and 2 will be dropped by the launch close to the Travellers' vehicle or ship if one is obviously present, or close to the rail station if not. They will waste time terrorising the townsfolk and may kill a few if there is resistance or they feel like it. Sooner or later, they will start to move towards the rail sheds. In the meantime, the mercenaries will drop a support gunner onto the top of the grain elevator by the simple but daring expedient of jumping from a hovering launch. Once established this gunner has a field of fire covering the town. The final two mercenaries will be dropped on the ridge west of town. This is the detachment leader and a sniper. The launch will then withdraw until needed.

The crew of the liner do not wish to become involved in the groundside operation and will act in a way that makes it look like they were hired or perhaps coerced by the mercenaries. Omicron Division would prefer to let Mercedes get away than reveal their asset at this time; there will be no space-side intervention if the Travellers or Mercedes escape in ships. Omicron Division will attempt to track vessels, however.

The mercenaries are willing to fight and even take some casualties to get a job done but ultimately they are ill-disciplined thugs. If the odds are against them they will try to fall back to the top of the ridge where the launch can pick them up. That might become impossible if, say, the Travellers have ship-mounted weapons. In this case the mercenaries are willing to surrender. They are rather bombastic about what their captors can and cannot do, with a newfound respect for interstellar law that was not in evidence when they were bullying the locals.

The mercenaries are a problem to be solved by the Travellers. A straight fight is possible but the mercenaries have a support weapon on the grain elevator and a sniper above the town. Just finding them could be an issue, with sudden close-range encounters among the wooden houses of the town. The Travellers might be unwilling to risk harming non-combatants but the mercenaries most certainly are not. Surrendered or captured mercenaries are also a problem.

The Travellers are well within their rights to defend themselves but they have no law enforcement powers. Detaining mercenaries long enough to hand them over to the authorities would be acceptable but shooting them out of hand would not. The Travellers need to find a solution and what they do might have repercussions later either when they meet other members of the Combateers or if there is an investigation which produces evidence of murder.

Mercedes is not interested in defeating the mercenaries, only in getting away from them. She will follow her escape plan and is quite willing to take Travellers with her. If it seems the Travellers can defeat the mercenaries, Mercedes might stick around long enough to pack properly but she realises that this location is thoroughly compromised. For all she knows there could be a missile incoming or a horde more mercenaries. She has had to relocate quickly in the past and, whilst she is sad to go, she is pragmatic about it. She might take the antimatter battery with her or set it to explode as a booby trap, depending on circumstances. The detonation will not much harm the town but will destroy all her notes and books. Again, this is sad but necessary in her eyes.

MERCENARY GRUNT

There are three 'grunts' in team 1 and two in team 2. These are the run-of-the-mill combatants fielded by the unit. They are equipped with flak jackets and helmets, TL9 assault rifles with a backup autopistol and two grenades. The usual mix is a flashbang and a fragmentation grenade but preferences vary.

MERCENARY GRUNT

SPECIES	GENDER	AGE
—	—	—

TRAITS			—	SKILLS
STR	9	INT	4	Athletics (strength) 1, Gun Combat (slug) 1, Recon 1
DEX	6	EDU	3	
END	8	SOC	3	

WEAPONS:	Assault Rifle (3D, Auto 2), Autopistol (3D-3)
ARMOUR:	Body Armour (+6)

MERCENARY LEADER/SCOUT

Each team is led by a more skilled combatant, who is equipped with a stunner in addition to the loadout used by the grunts.

MERCENARY SUPPORT GUNNER

The support gunner swaps a general-purpose machinegun for the rifle and does not carry grenades.

MERCENARY SNIPER

The mercenary force's sniper is a reasonable marksman but lacks the advanced training of a true sniper. He is fairly good at concealing himself or finding cover when the need arises but, like the other members of the force, is complacent and might not initially realise he is up against significant opposition.

MERCENARY LEADER

The mercenaries' leader got to that position by being ruthless and also effective. The two do not always go together in the bottom end of the mercenary marketplace. She will try to handle her unruly troops like a proper unit, which may or may not work, but is quite willing to abandon any or all of them if the situation goes badly wrong.

MERCENARY LEADER

SPECIES	GENDER	AGE
—	—	—

TRAITS			—	SKILLS
STR	7	INT	8	Athletics (dexterity) 2, Electronics (comms) 1, Gun Combat (slug) 2, Medic 1, Recon 1, Stealth 2, Tactics (military) 2
DEX	11	EDU	5	
END	11	SOC	5	

WEAPONS:	Submachinegun (3D-2, Auto 3), Autopistol (3D-3), Stunner (2D, Stun, Zero-G)
ARMOUR:	Body Armour (+6)

MERCENARY LEADER/SCOUT

SPECIES	GENDER	AGE
—	—	—

TRAITS			—	SKILLS
STR	8	INT	7	Athletics (dexterity) 1, Gun Combat (slug) 2, Medic 1, Persuade 1, Recon 1, Stealth 1
DEX	9	EDU	5	
END	9	SOC	4	

WEAPONS:	Assault Rifle (3D, Auto 2), Autopistol (3D-3), Stunner (2D, Stun, Zero-G)
ARMOUR:	Body Armour (+6)

MERCENARY SUPPORT GUNNER

SPECIES	GENDER	AGE
—	—	—

TRAITS			—	SKILLS
STR	10	INT	6	Athletics (endurance) 1, Gun Combat (slug) 2, Recon 1, Stealth 1
DEX	8	EDU	4	
END	10	SOC	4	

WEAPONS:	Machinegun (3D, Auto 4), Autopistol (3D-3), Stunner (2D, Stun, Zero-G)
ARMOUR:	Body Armour (+6)

MERCENARY SNIPER

SPECIES	GENDER	AGE
—	—	—

TRAITS			—	SKILLS
STR	6	INT	6	Gun Combat (slug) 3, Recon 2, Stealth 2
DEX	10	EDU	6	
END	7	SOC	5	

WEAPONS:	Marksman Rifle (3D+2, Scope), Autopistol (3D-3), Stunner (2D, Stun, Zero-G)
ARMOUR:	Body Armour (+6)

LEAVING PAGATON

Whatever happens, Mercedes is adamant that she needs to leave immediately. Travellers who want her to stay clearly do not understand what they are up against and what might happen any moment. Mercedes is willing to let some of the Travellers go with her whilst others head back to their ship. They can rendezvous in orbit and transfer personnel but after that she must 'do something' and do it alone. This basically means checking her other locations are still safe and changing her identity.

Mercedes makes sure the Travellers have what they need to find Twilight's Peak and that they understand what is at stake. It is a functioning Ancients installation with all manner of wondrous devices inside. It must not fall into the hands of Omicron Division or a resurgent Ancients faction! Mercedes gives the Travellers an unassuming gem-like object, different in shape and colour to the others. It will get them inside, she says. They will have to follow the path she and her companions took, landing in the big crater ('you can't miss it' she says) and proceeding towards the tallest peak. At its base they will find fissures in the rock, which can be followed to an entry point. 'Just watch where you're putting your feet,' Mercedes adds.

Mercedes cannot be sure she can trust the Travellers but events are beginning to unfold and she needs to take action before it is too late. Therefore she hopes to send the Travellers ahead to Twilight's Peak and join them there as soon as she can. That will not happen; Mercedes becomes side-tracked avoiding Omicron Division and does not arrive until it is too late. However, what she learns during this time will be important to the Travellers during *Wrath of the Ancients*.

The Travellers would be well advised to get away from Pagaton as quickly as possible. If they want to look for more information they can do so but great events are beginning to unfold and there is only so much time before someone else finds the Ancients base. The Travellers will not be able to find Vlen, the Captain of Knowledge is in Omicron Division custody and useless besides, and they will not locate Yusote in the nearby systems. Blanca might be recruited for an expedition to the base… if the Travellers want to detour to Callia, if she is still there, and if Omicron Division is not crawling all over Makintown.

When the Travellers come down to it, they are on their own. However, they now know where Twilight's Peak is located and they have a way in. The stage is set for their expedition into the heart of an Ancients base where they will unravel some of the mysteries of the Ancients and begin a process that could change Charted Space forever.

TWILIGHT'S PEAK

The Travellers now know there is a functional Ancients base on Lydia, inside a tall mountain in the world's twilight zone. Given Mercedes Karamaka's penchant for terrible poetry it was perhaps inevitable she would name the location something like this. The builders did no such thing; they probably assigned it a number or bland descriptor. The base on Lydia was never very important – this is one reason it escaped destruction – but with so little remaining of the Ancients it is a valuable asset to any resurgent faction.

The Travellers and Mercedes know the base is functional. What they do not know is that it is now operational. Twilight's Peak was visited some years ago by agents of a surviving Ancients faction, who started some of its machinery. This required entering parts of the installation that Mercedes and her crew never knew existed. It is now possible to get into these areas and, in theory at least, study the technology there. Omicron Division would do literally *anything* to get access but at this time they do not know about the installation. Even if they did, most of their main assets are currently haring off across the Trojan Reach to deal with a crisis there. Omicron Division would have to use outside assets such as the mercenaries the Travellers encountered, or the Travellers themselves.

There is a window of opportunity for the Travellers to get into Twilight's Peak and perhaps gain control of it but they need to act quickly. A merciless Referee might decide that Travellers who spend too long faffing about with side trips and the like arrive too late. If so, they may find nothing but ruins, or witness an attempt by a team thrown together by Omicron Division to breach the installation. This will end badly… very badly indeed. The Travellers may have to contend with an even more complex situation.

If Twilight's Peak is destroyed before the Travellers get there, the campaign will more or less end there. This might feel like a let-down for the Travellers so should be reserved as the antimatter planetbuster option for Travellers who insist that the storyline must always wait for them. The pieces are in place for *Secrets of the Ancients* and *Wrath of the Ancients* is triggered in part by the destruction of Twilight's Peak. Thus, Travellers who postpone visiting Twilight's Peak until they have gained every possible advantage and arrive too late can still experience the other campaigns. However, they will lose out on more than just the experience of exploring the Ancients base.

Travellers who do their best to go straight to Twilight's Peak have the most advantages – notably in terms of time – when exploring the base. Events will begin to unfold around them, leading to a climax in which the Travellers will face the Ancients themselves. Weak, almost insignificant by the standards of their peers, these beings are still far above the level of the Travellers and will only gain in power if not stopped.

THE ANCIENTS BASE

Long ago, the base on Lydia was a minor outpost of an Ancients faction. War was raging among the Ancients; a war that would ultimately cause the collapse of their society. An experiment was ordered, using the creatures now known as G482. They were effective up to a point but their rather basic intellect was a limiting factor. The staff at Twilight's Peak were ordered to improve upon the basic design. They did their best.

G482 creatures are produced by a process that some Ancients factions would consider an abomination. This opinion would be shared by most modern Droyne if they knew about the creatures. Immature Droyne undergo a ritual which causes them to rapidly develop into one of the six castes – Leaders, Warriors, Drones, Warriors, Workers and Sports. An alteration to this ceremony causes the Droyne to instead develop into a near-mindless G482. Most factions considered this to be a perversion of the subject's essential nature and also the natural order of things. An immature Droyne should develop into the caste it was meant for and serve its community. This was… something else.

The Ancients were never very shy about messing around with nature or people and to this faction at least there was nothing wrong with altering the casteing ritual. Nobody seemed to object to moving planets in their orbit or completely changing an ecosystem, which meant altering the natural order of things in a much bigger and more permanent way. As gods in a malleable universe, they did as they pleased. However, this was a step too far for many factions and the ultimate downfall of those who attempted it.

The aim of the project at Twilight’s Peak was to create a creature with the capabilities of G482 and the intellect of a Droyne Warrior. It would be able to make smart tactical decisions and use ranged weapons whilst remaining unperceived by its victims’ allies. Two methods were attempted, both only marginally successful. Further alterations to the casteing process produced wildly variable results including psychotic Warriors intent on killing everything in sight and clumsy, misshapen creatures that could not survive the rapid development and growth that followed the ritual. Some specimens were viable and put into use or stored for future activation. Those recovered by modern scientists and studied by Omicron Division came from a group stored elsewhere.

The other method used was consciousness transference. This would, in theory, allow a Droyne to transfer its consciousness to a G482. Its own body would probably die, although it might be possible to keep it alive in suspended animation or by some other means. In the meantime the Droyne gained a more effective killing-machine body to use. The scientists at Twilight’s Peak took this idea and ran with it, attempting consciousness-transfer to cloned bodies, forced extra development of casted Droyne, augmentation of existing bodies and even transference of consciousness to starship-sized creatures. Results were mixed and had not borne fruit at the point where this faction was destroyed by its rivals.

Twilight’s Peak escaped notice and thus was not destroyed, and without direction its staff decided to mothball the installation and leave. They tried to reach a fallback location, intending to reoccupy the facility when the faction was strong enough. That day never came and ever since the base has been waiting faithfully for someone to reactivate it. It is still fully functional but most systems are shut down.

Many years ago, Mercedes Karamaka and her companions were seeking shelter from a raider attack when they found the base. Unknown to them, the base’s automated monitoring system was tracking all orbital activity. Construing the raiders as a threat, and the crippled scout/courier as irrelevant, the base’s systems destroyed the raiders using a focused disintegrator effect. One ship simply ceased to exist as anything but fragments and loose atoms, most of which recombined in a brilliant display of released energy. The other lost critical systems and rapidly broke up but not before some of the crew were able to escape.

In the years since the raider came down, salvagers have picked over the remains of the ship until nothing remained. They never suspected they were working under the threat of instant disintegration.

Mercedes and her crew, pursued by Vargr mercenaries, were able to gain entry to the installation. A couple of the Vargr got in but were eliminated by automated defence systems or simple happenstance. Some of Mercedes’ crew were also killed by their ignorance. They explored part of the base, took what they needed to jury-rig their ship and left with a few artefacts. The plan was to return at some point but each of the survivors took a path leading elsewhere. Some parts of the base remained deactivated and they never realised how large or how important it might be.

When the disintegrator fired, it triggered a sequence of events that are even now just beginning to unfold. It was not the weapon discharge but the recognition of a threat to the installation that triggered the first action and that action was little more than dropping a rock. In the bowels of Twilight’s Peak a robotic arm released an inscribed metal ovoid. It fell and beneath it was a teleportation device. The ovoid vanished from Twilight’s Peak and reappeared on a telereceptor platform many parsecs away. An attentive Droyne Worker took it to his supervisor who showed it to a Sport. The ovoid and the message it bore was thus brought to the attention of a Leader.

This was a message from the distant past, in effect. It told the Leader that the Twilight’s Peak installation was active and possibly under threat. No direct teleporter link was available, so a journey of several decades would be required. There was no question of whether it should be undertaken; the orders left by the Leader’s master were very clear. His Oytrip was to watch and wait for such a signal and act immediately to secure surviving installations. The master was a surviving Ancient, albeit a minor one. Twilight’s Peak is the key to his resurgence.

Ships were reactivated, crews assembled and the flotilla readied for its mission. It began its long transit towards what was now the Spinward Marches. The installation was to be seized and readied for use by the master. Resistance was not to be tolerated; resistance did materialise, over a world in the Trojan Reaches. Other Droyne had received a similar message, Droyne who served a different master. They, too, would tolerate no interference.

A clash of advanced Droyne warships using weapons beyond TL15 attracted attention and Omicron Division responded. They gathered the best they had and went to intercept the advancing Droyne fleet. What happened to them is detailed in *Wrath of the Ancients.*

In the meantime, a high-speed messenger vessel sped ahead of the advancing Droyne flotilla. It reached Twilight's peak three years ago and its personnel entered the base. They were not Ancients but served one. They have an agenda; to prepare the installation for full activation and the unfolding of their master's plan.

EVENTS AT TWILIGHT'S PEAK

The timeline for events at Twilight's Peak can be considered to be semi-independent of the Travellers' actions. As already noted, they may decide to wander about doing side missions for several months before heading for Lydia, or they may insist on taking actions that allow them to enter the base tooled up in battle dress with plasma guns. Travellers who stack the odds this way are making a choice but it is not without consequences. The Referee should not penalise minor asides or the necessity to take a roundabout route to avoid detection, so should implement the phases of the base's awakening when they are dramatically appropriate rather than sticking slavishly to a timeline that may not be suited to their group of Travellers.

Three Years Ago: A Droyne scout ship from outside Imperial space reached Twilight's Peak. Its crew entered the installation and began reactivating its systems.

Five Days Ago: Droyne Leader Yusote arrived at the installation and gained entry. His party were not contacted by the Droyne already present but were watched.

Phase 0: During Phase 0 the base is being reactivated. So long as the Travellers and Yusote's people do not enter the inner part of the facility or cause significant damage, they will be ignored.

Arrival of the Travellers: If the Travellers make a reasonable attempt to get to Twilight's Peak quickly they arrive early in Phase 0. If they dally too much their arrival will be towards the end of Phase 0.

Phase 1: Once the base is fully activated the focus will move to reactivating some of the G482 creatures stored there. These will be tested by sending them against nearby targets – intruders and the population of Lydia.

Late Arrival of the Travellers: If the Travellers insist on taking a lot of side trips or engaging in lengthy preparations they arrive early in Phase 1. Their initial exploration of the base will be much more dangerous. Note that delays beyond their control such as having to take the long way around in a jump-1 ship do not count. Late arrival in this case means the Travellers made choices that resulted in delays.

Phase 2: If there seems to be a significant threat or the tests have run their course, the focus will shift to clearing the base of intruders and readying it for the arrival of the faction leader.

Very Late Arrival of the Travellers: If the Travellers really take their time about getting to Twilight's Peak they arrive late in Phase 2. A force from Omicron Division will also arrive around the same time, further complicating matters.

Phase 3: If the Travellers fail to dislodge the current occupants of the installation, the fully operational base will become the home of a resurgent Ancient. He will begin gathering surviving artefacts from surviving sites nearby and subjugating populations to serve him. G482 will be instrumental in this, so he needs Droyne initially; other species can serve as workers and cannon-fodder. This outcome will be disastrous for the people of Charted Space.

TSYAMOYKYO, LEAST OF THE ANCIENTS

The following information is for the use of the Referee. Much of it, perhaps all of it, will remain unknown to the Travellers during this campaign. However, it is necessary for the Referee to know why certain events are unfolding and what the future holds.

The being now known as Tsyamoykyo was one of the Ancients. He is a clone of a clone of Yaskoydray, or Grandfather, first and greatest of the Ancients. Biologically he is a Droyne but as a person – if something as magnificent and super-intelligent as an Ancient can be called that – he is as different from them as from any other species and as far above them as humans are to ants or bees.

In his time, Tsyamoykyo was one of the most minor of the Ancients. His fascination with obscure science and experiments of a minute nature resulted in him being sidelined and garnering little support. Whilst others were moving planets or accelerating the lifespan of stars, Tsyamoykyo was fiddling about with the genetic code of unimportant servitor species. Others had similar interests but their projects were bigger and better – or at least more impressive.

At some point, Tsyamoykyo became useful as a subordinate and was quickly brought under the control of other, more influential Ancients. His resentment was irrelevant; he was made to serve and work on projects his masters wanted. Among them was what is now known as G482 as well as other biological 'systems' including workers, mineral extraction devices and even spacecraft. His creations were used to force populations of planets to remain loyal to their masters and those masters were not Tsyamoykyo.

So Tsyamoykyo planned a betrayal. As the Ancients factionalised and turned on one another, his creations went haywire. Some worked as planned, others turned on their masters. Tsyamoykyo looked upon the chaos erupting among those who had enslaved him and was pleased. He retreated from Charted Space as war tore the Ancients' civilisation apart. His creations wiped out the populations of whole star systems and quite possibly accounted for some of the Ancients themselves. He could not witness this, for he had retreated to a pre-planned hiding place where he would remain until the time was right.

Tsyamoykyo was weak and all but insignificant in the eyes of other Ancients but he was as a god to his remaining followers. Countless lives were spent scavenging the battlefields of the Final War. As the Ancients smashed planets and depopulated star systems to break one another's power, they scarcely noticed the rats who scurried among the wreckage… and they never knew what those rats were doing.

What could be scavenged was broken and fragmentary but it was sufficient for Tsyamoykyo to build a secret haven for himself. Not all of it was materiel; people fleeing the destruction of the Final War were quietly guided to safe worlds where they could rebuild a technological society. Over time these would become Tsyamoykyo's tools, he hoped, but the path to greatness was very slow. Tsyamoykyo needed more than what had been scavenged. However, his need to remain hidden outweighed other concerns. So he built slowly, tools to make tools to make machines to make starships and weapons. The work of millennia but necessary work.

Thousands of years passed and the Ancients were all but forgotten. New civilisations arose, feeble shadows of what had been but free from the shackles of their overlords. Tsyamoykyo rebuilt his strength in secret, starting with almost nothing. He moved cautiously despite his eagerness to replace the fallen Ancients civilisation but a few tens of thousands of years were a small price to pay for eternal dominance over the galaxy.

Finally, a signal came from one of the hidden installations Tsyamoykyo had left behind. Perhaps others had survived perhaps not; his teleporter-based communications system was only deployed at a couple of locations before he fled. One base might be enough, he decided, and began to move. Gathering what strength he had, Tsyamoykyo set out for Lydia in the Spinward Marches.

Tsyamoykyo was not expecting interference or opposition. He hoped to reoccupy the base at Lydia and produce large numbers of G482 creatures which could be used to force compliance among local worlds. This would create a powerbase within a few decades or even just years; an incredibly short time frame compared to long centuries of hiding. His thinking was distorted by resentment of the Ancients who subjugated him and a desire to take what had been theirs. He was caught by surprise when his fleet was intercepted by a force of Droyne vessels in the Trojan Reach.

THE BEST LAID PLANS OF RATS AND THEIR OVERLORDS...

Some Droyne communities remembered the Ancients in awe and veneration, others in fear. Some preserved their memories and vowed never again to be subjugated. They were not specifically watching for Tsyamoykyo but they were watching. Yusote is just one of their many Leaders tasked with keeping Ancients sites and artefacts out of the hands of anyone who might use them against his people. Whilst he has been searching the Spinward Marches for artefacts, others were seeking signs that some of the Ancients were still alive and perhaps becoming active.

These watchers were aware of a quiet war being fought in Charted Space; a war of assassins and unexplained disappearances rather than the smashing of stars but a war nonetheless. Factions were vying for control of societies, the development of technology and of course surviving Ancients sites. Yusote's people knew only a fragment of the truth; the same truth Mercedes Karamaka suspects. The Ancients, or perhaps their would-be successors, are engaged in a quiet power-struggle for control of their former territory.

Yusote's Oytrip possessed technology equivalent to the best the Imperium has available, plus artefacts they can use but not replicate. They remained quiet and hidden on a remote world, sending their ships far across the cosmos to seek any sign of resurgent Ancients or a success or civilisation. Finally, one returned with news that the worst had happened – a fleet of powerful ships was headed for Imperial space. Whilst Yusote's Oytrip cared little for the fate of humans, the conquest would give this resurgent Ancient a power base that could threaten them.

With no better options, Yusote's people assembled their fleet and prepared an ambush. They named the Ancient 'Tsyamoykyo', which translates from the Droyne language of Oynprith as 'long-awaited disaster'. They engaged the vanguard of his fleet and were smashed aside as they had expected. The best and finest of their warships were as toys to the power of Tsyamoykyo's force. Yet they inflicted casualties and more importantly they drew his attention. Even as Tsyamoykyo revelled in the rout of his enemy, the second force struck his transport ships. Many were destroyed, eliminating resources he had spent millennia assembling.

By their sacrifice, the fleet of Yusote's Oytrip set back Tsyamoykyo's plans and delayed his arrival in Imperial space. The price was huge, however. Not only was their fleet annihilated but they became his primary target. Even now he searches for their hidden Oytrip, intent on enslaving them and creating a new power base. It will take time, and the Lydia base will be vulnerable until he can secure it, but Tsyamoykyo's plan is the same. He will descend upon Imperial space, seize what remains of his forebears and make himself master of the cosmos. The details have changed but the intent is a strong as ever.

This is the crisis that has distracted Omicron Division. A previously unsuspected fleet of Droyne warships has been sighted close to Imperial space. Scout vessels located it, or rather what was left of it. The few survivors spoke of a long-awaited disaster about to befall Charted Space and… they asked for help. This is virtually unheard-of from Droyne but despite it being couched in terms of warning and bare facts about the threat, the message was clear. Yusote's Oytrip is threatened by a resurgent Ancient. The threat is real and huge but it might be halted. Better, the Omicron Division commander on the spot decided, to fight on someone else's land. And so Omicron Division gallantly entered the fray. Their fate will become apparent in *Wrath of the Ancients*.

TSYAMOYKYO'S PLANS

Tsyamoykyo is aware that he needs to move carefully. Upstart civilisations among the former servitor species pose a threat to his faction, a fact that is annoying and embarrassing. Humans and the other civilisations in Charted Space are as ants to an Ancient but there are too many ants for open conquest. An army of G482 creatures could change that, holding planetary populations hostage or eliminating those which did not want to serve their rightful master. He still wants the Lydia installation but first needs to take control of the Oytrip that dared oppose him.

Thus Tsyamoykyo has turned aside for now. He will need some time to pacify Yusote's Oytrip. It may be mere months, more likely years or perhaps a decade or two. What is certain is that Tsyamoykyo is coming to Imperial space intent on conquest. There, he will find there other active Ancients at work… and perhaps the upstart species are more resilient than he expects.

Tsyamoykyo does not appear in *Secrets of the Ancients*, as he is busy elsewhere. His resurgence is one of the driving forces of *Wrath of the Ancients* and that campaign will allow the Travellers to experience first-hand the enormity of the threat he and his kind pose to all Charted Space.

LYDIA

The world of Lydia is described on page 204. The Travellers may already have passed by on their way to Pagaton but will not have detected anything unusual. The base is well hidden and undetectable by any instruments available to the Travellers, whilst the wreckage of the downed corsair was removed long ago. Now, however, the Travellers have with them devices that will be detected by the installation, which will in turn reveal itself. These may be the transmitter wired into *Garnette's* avionics or the one given to the Travellers by Mercedes.

Alternatively, if the Travellers have misplaced these devices the Referee has another option. The gems encountered by the Travellers, such as the one sent to them by Sorrel, have an effect on anyone exposed to them for an extended period. Travellers who meditated on a gem or just handled it for a while have been undergoing this effect. It is not enough to cause madness, not yet, but those Travellers will be on edge, irritable and convinced that a great discovery is just out of their reach. This may be something to do with the gems but anything else the Traveller considers important – from figuring out the Ancients to getting a date with someone they met three starports back – will also be the subject of a vague but intense 'nearly there, just a few pieces to put in place' sensation.

This effect is accompanied by changes in the Traveller's brainwaves. These are not large and might not be detected by even a skilled telepath unless they knew what they were looking for. However, the access mechanism for the Lydia installation is based on psionics. It constantly – and undetectably – searches for anyone in the vicinity with the right patten. Once detected, it activates the access system for the outer part of the base. So, as soon as the Travellers are close enough to look upon the great mountain in Lydia's twilight zone the base will detect them and prepare for their arrival.

THE ANCIENTS BASE

The base is mostly located inside the mountain. It has multiple levels and is divided into three main components. The 'outer' base is subject to a lower level of security than the 'inner' area – outer and inner in this case are not exactly physical in nature but refer to the importance of the area. The 'inner' base might be considered much like the keep of a castle, containing the owner's dwelling and most items of importance whilst the 'outer' area represents everything within the castle walls – gatehouses, stables, workshops and dwellings for persons of lesser importance. The third component of the base is not within the mountain and indeed in some cases is not on Lydia. These areas are reached by way of teleporters from specific points in the base and have their own security conditions.

It will be readily apparent to anyone entering the base that it was built by and for Droyne or Droyne-like creatures. Work surfaces, furniture and controls are at a comfortable height for Droyne, which may make them awkward for humans and similar creatures. Walls, floors and ceilings are typically a light silver-grey, tending to a darker tone in some areas and decorated with swirling patterns which sometimes seem to resolve themselves into familiar shapes. Some of the Travellers may suddenly get the feeling they know part of a story or a fact they are certain they never knew before, but as soon as they try to concentrate on it the thought is gone and the patterns are just that. This effect is discussed on page 237.

Light comes from everywhere and nowhere, creating a weird not-quite-lack-of-shadows. Nothing has a distinct shadow but the diffuse light is partially blocked by objects creating a slightly darker zone on the side opposite where most of the light reaching the object comes from. Since the floors also emit light, objects are counter-shaded which makes it difficult for the eye to resolve them. The result is weird and slightly uncomfortable for most people, who will have difficulty recognising even familiar objects beyond a few paces. The Travellers will get used to this sooner or later but at first it is disorientating.

There is other sensory strangeness as well. The whole base has what might be described as an inaudible hum about it. There is never total silence but rarely any loud noises. Sound is naturally deadened by the walls and floor, restricting the distance a shouted conversation or a gunshot can be heard. Touching surfaces causes the Traveller to perceive a slight vibration without actually feeling one. Smell is weirdly neutral unless there is a strong source nearby. Anyone who really wants to try out their other sense is welcome to lick a wall if they want. It tastes of nothing at all. The overall effect of these conditions is unsettling to those unused to them but soothing to the original inhabitants. Most Droyne would find the conditions entirely suitable for the tasks they are assigned to undertake.

GENERAL CHARACTERISTICS

The base is within millions of tons of rock, with few penetrations to the surface. There are natural caves and cracks within the mountain but the facility is entirely solid and intact. Even if a weapon could punch through all that rock the base is all but impervious. It is also nearly impossible to detect, as emissions are absorbed and redirected by the outer skin of the facility. This is accomplished by means of an electromagnetic field permeating all outer surfaces and major inner walls. It is sufficient to prevent detection and also to block energy weapons. If power were completely lost the field would eventually degrade, rendering the installation detectable and more vulnerable, but with the field in place it is virtually invulnerable.

Lasers, plasma and fusion weapons are greatly mitigated, delivering around 5% of their normal damage against the outer walls and bulkheads. Disintegrators, particle accelerators and meson guns are entirely dissipated, blocked or absorbed. Nuclear weapons are rendered ineffective by an effect similar to a nuclear damper, which also nullifies antimatter explosives. Other weapons, such as kinetic impact or conventional explosives, are not affected but unlikely to do sufficient damage to make any difference. It might be possible to blast away the mountain from around the installation and swamp it with firepower but realistically the only way to harm the installation is from inside.

Outer walls and major structural components can be considered to have spacecraft Armour: 30 and require a further 10 points of spacecraft-level damage to make a fist-sized hole. 100 points will make a hole big enough for a human to walk through and 1,000 points are needed to completely destroy a section of wall or bulkhead about five square metres in size. Walls and bulkheads are self-repairing, requiring 2D minutes to reseal a one metre square area and a further 2D minutes to bring it back up to full integrity. Internal walls, fittings and doors are considered to have the same amount of armour and hits but on the personnel scale.

Walls and floors feel smooth but offer good grip to anyone running on them. There are almost no projections that could be used for climbing. Doors normally open automatically or not at all but there is a touch-pad beside each which can be used to manually open a door if the user is authorised. This is rarely used, since the original occupants had no need for personal privacy. Those assigned to go in an area would go there; those who were not, would not. Nobody owned anything and nothing was ever stolen. The only question was security against hostiles and that was handled by the overall control system of the base.

Security was very simple. Personnel could be authorised for the outer base only, the whole installation, or not at all. Doors would open for authorised personnel and not for anyone else no matter what they did with the activation panel. Those were primarily used when servitor species personnel had to be confined at times or their movements restricted. If the automatic open were to be turned off the manual panel would still only operate for authorised personnel. There are no electronics a typical citizen of Charted Space would recognise even if the panel could be forced and no apparent way to hack the controlling software.

DOORS, BRIDGES AND ACCESS POINTS

Doorways are high enough for a human to walk through without ducking but are more or less oval in shape. Standard doors are a vertical oval, 1.2 metres wide at the base and tapering to a gentle point above. Doors intended for movement of machinery or groups of people are arranged as a horizontal oval. In both cases the oval is not complete but implied, with the floor cutting off one end. Doors retract upwards into the wall when open and normally close quickly but safely, slowing to allow someone in the doorway to move aside. They can, however, be emergency-slammed which will cut anyone unlucky enough to be in the way in half.

The part of the oval below the floor level contains machinery for projecting an emergency field across the door. This exists only within the space of the doorway and is quite resilient. Fields can take a nominal 26 hits before collapsing but regenerate at a rate of 1D hits per round. The field is intended to stop objects and people passing through but also slows the progress of gases to some extent. A breached area open to vacuum – which is highly unlikely in this installation – cannot be completely sealed off with the field but the escape of atmosphere can be controlled to gain time for other measures.

CONTROLS AND SYSTEMS

Virtually all controls are automated, requiring minimal input from the Travellers. Operating them is thus a matter of figuring out how the interface works rather than inputting commands or making fine adjustments with a joystick. Air circulation, water recycling and waste disposal are all carried out automatically to maintain a comfortable environment based on the base's evaluation of the occupants' needs. This sometimes means changing the gas mix and temperature in one chamber then another as an individual moves around. The system is very complex but using it is not.

The actual controls are barely even recognisable as such. In some cases they appear to be decorative bumps and shapes on an otherwise unremarkable surface. It is quite possible for the Travellers to be sitting around one of the main control consoles for the entire base, discussing how, for all their capabilities, the Ancients made lousy coffee tables. Once the Travellers learn to recognise what is a control interface they have some chance of operating it. Ideally, the Travellers should come to the realisation by roleplaying their interaction with the base rather than just making a check.

Most controls are manual but do not move. There are no sliders but there are depressions a Traveller can put a finger in and push in the desired direction. There are no knobs that can be turned but there are protrusions a Traveller can twist, or push, or furiously waggle about. Controls respond to a combination of force, rhythm, timing, and pressure, and might be used in more than one way. For example, a protrusion might respond to being tapped, or twisted, or pushed in a chosen direction, producing varying results. Travellers with a musical background will find the process a lot more intuitive than those used to touch screens and joysticks.

In some cases a given control or set of controls will be locked. This might be by command of the base's high-level control system but is sometimes the result of interactions with other systems. For example, it may be necessary to turn off one system before another can be used. Specific circumstances are indicated as they occur. In general, controls in the 'outer' base can be used by anyone inside it whilst the 'inner' base must recognise personnel as being authorised to operate a given system. Authorisation can only be granted in a particular chamber, by way of a ritual process. The Travellers may be able to figure out the correct ritual, which will give them an insight that may be useful in later adventures.

Once the Travellers know what to look for there are three stages to learning to operate a control system. First, the Travellers must recognise it as such, then they need to work out what it is for. Finally, they can learn to operate it. Control systems are mostly specialised. The Ancients were quite capable of creating a single integrated system to run everything from anywhere but it appears they simply liked specialisation. Perhaps there is another reason for this level of compartmentalisation but anyone who thinks about it will realise that the controls of the base are ideally suited to someone with a massive ego who likes ordering others to perform tasks and enjoys watching them obey. This fits with the apparent cultural psyche of the Ancients.

In general, it is easier to learn to make very coarse adjustments than fine or complex ones. Travellers who figure out a control set but do not use it much will only be able to make big adjustments and may miss more subtle features altogether. Time spent practicing will give the Travellers improved control over the installation's systems but skill with each one must be developed separately. Given the circumstances, it is highly unlikely the Travellers will be able to master all the installation's functions.

System Controls

Stage	Definition	Roleplaying	Skill Check
0	The Travellers need to work out what a control system looks like.	Fiddling with stuff will eventually produce results which can be correlated to whatever the Traveller did. Alternatively, a Traveller might bump into something or accidentally operate a control.	Difficult (10+) Investigate check whilst exploring the base in general. Checks can be made every 3D minutes of deliberate attempts to understand how the place works, or 1D hours of just being inside the base.
1	The Travellers seek to identify or locate a specific control system.	Deliberate searching for something that looks like it should operate the chosen system. Taking into account ergonomic factors such as height, facing and space around the controls.	Average (8+) Investigate check. Checks can be made every 2D minutes of searching in the right place – usually this means the chamber where the control system is located.
2	The Travellers try to figure out what a control system does.	Trial and error, fiddling around with controls and observing the results if any can be discerned. There is no guarantee that the controls operate the system the Travellers think they do.	Difficult (10+) Investigate check. Checks can be made every 1D minutes of trial and error experimentation. The Referee may award a positive DM if the Travellers have relevant skills.
3	The Travellers want to operate the controlled system.	Finer trial and error, observing the results and how the control settings interact.	Investigate check of a level depending on the complexity of the system and what the Travellers are trying to do with it.

DÉCOR AND FURNITURE

The installation is furnished for Droyne-sized creatures and built very much in the Droyne style. Most facilities are grouped in sixes, typically in a hexagon pattern around a central point. Furniture would be uncomfortable for humans under most circumstances but most of it is self-adjusting. This might be quite alarming the first few times it happens; someone sits down on an uncomfortably low chair, only to feel it growing under them until it is perfectly proportioned. Not all the furniture operates like this; some items were sized to a creature equivalent to a typical Droyne Leader and are not intended for anyone else.

Items such as eating utensils are dispensed when wanted and placed in a disposal device afterward. They weigh almost nothing, being fabricated from the minimum amount of matter, but are quite robust at first. After an hour or so they begin to degrade and will crumble into fine dust within a couple of days. There are no plates or bowls; meals are dispensed at an eating station which configures its surface to the current need. Drinking vessels are simple beakers fabricated in the same manner as the utensils. They transmit almost no heat to the hand, making it possible to wander around the base with dangerously hot liquids if the Travellers are so inclined.

There are no beds in the installation, not in the usual sense. Instead each occupant has a sleeping pod not unlike those used by Yusote's crew but these are vastly more advanced. Sleeping occupants are monitored on a constant basis. Pods can be set to assist sleep by adjusting temperature, humidity and even air pressure. They can also vibrate or rock gently, or play sounds that assist rest. Any given pod can function as an autodoc or low berth for its occupant, although the capabilities of the pods are not so great as those of a dedicated medical pod.

The pods have a more sinister function. At any time a pod can be instructed to sedate and/or cryogenically freeze its occupant, to render them unconscious using gas or a rather brutal electroshock stunner, or to kill them. This function can only be trigged from the central command chamber but cannot be disabled on most sleeping pods. Only those of very high-level personnel such as the installation commander are unable to murder their occupants in this manner.

At some point the Travellers will have to investigate the sanitary facilities. Personal cleaning uses much the same methods as the Travellers will be used to; warm water and mild chemicals. However, showers also have an ultrasonic vibration mode and can project ultraviolet light to kill bacteria. This is a part of every shower cycle unless disabled and is powerful enough to temporarily blind anyone who does not close their eyes. During this time the Traveller will suffer a negative DM due to extreme dazzling. This begins at DM-6, applied to all checks requiring sight and reduces by one every 2D minutes. Toilets are conventional, other than using a disintegrator rather than a flush system. The flash of annihilated bodily waste could be quite alarming the first few times.

As with furniture and sanitary facilities, tools and other devices tend towards functional simplicity with decoration varying depending on the importance of the device. A weapon or piece of machinery is likely to be functional first and foremost, but with a tendency towards sweeping curves. Most items are decorated in swirling patterns over a pearlescent silver-grey base.

Many chambers contain statues, which are sometimes placed in counter-intuitive places. It may be necessary to walk around one or thread a path between several upon entering a chamber. The statues had a ritual significance for the original builders of the base and the paths walked around them were part of keeping the installation 'feeling right' to its staff. Most of the statues are of Droyne but other species are represented. Humans are most common, then Vargr, then others. The statues are clothed in what were presumably the fashions of the time, with non-Droyne wearing variants of that worn by the Droyne.

Chambers typically have an oval layout, with a curved ceiling of varying height. Some are barely high enough for an average human to walk down the middle under the highest point, whilst most are three to four metres at their high point. Some chambers are much higher, not always for any obvious reason. Walls and ceilings tend to be decorated like weapons and equipment; swirling patterns of greys, silver, blues and greens. With few exceptions these colours are pale and muted, as if the installation were painted in metallic watercolours.

None of this is merely decorative. The images have a great deal of meaning to those who know how to interpret them – which the Travellers do not. They might be considered to be in part a guide and map to the installation, in part a reminder about the history of the people who built and operated it, and also what might be considered a 'thought pathway guide' which conditioned the base staff to follow correct ways of thinking. The equivalent in human terms would be for every room to contain a massive signpost with directions, snippets of historical information and a catchy slogan.

Some of the art is more than that, acting as a psionic trigger. This technique is still used today in some Droyne societies, to convey information or ensure it remains current. Most triggers are superficial, like those noted above, but very important information or events can be recorded in a great work of art, often on the walls and ceiling of a ceremonial space. A memory trigger of this sort programmes the mind of the observer with images which are then played as if they were personal memories. Information is not conveyed by the art itself; it is conjured up by the observer's subconscious in response to the trigger. They do not see a recording of what happened so much as they imagine it based upon detailed instructions fed to their subconscious.

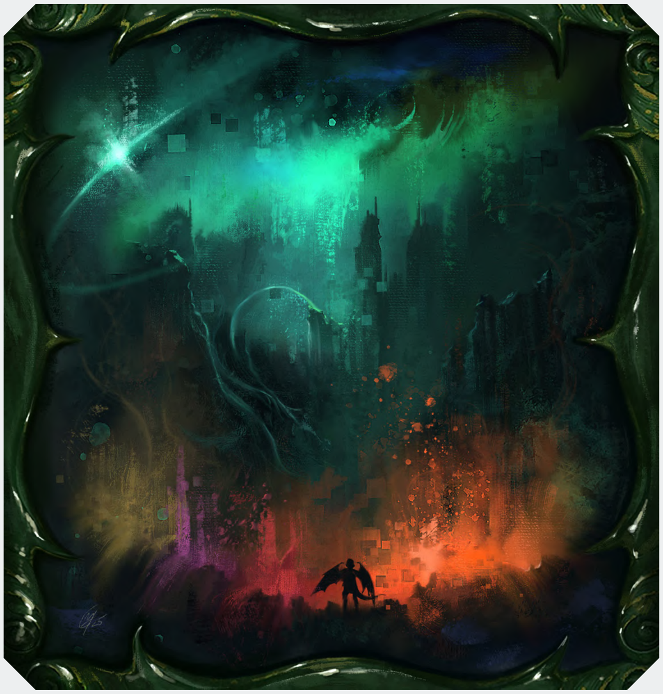
This method of conveying information is highly accurate for Droyne. Some other species, notably those that had contact with the Ancients, have a very small percentage of sensitives who can be triggered by the artworks. Information in this case may not be conveyed very accurately; it may be fragmented, distorted or nightmare-like. Indeed, some images may cause confusion, disorientation or terror in sensitives despite their actual content being benign. Important information-bearing artworks of this sort are normally at the heart of a Droyne community, where outsiders are not permitted to go. Their existence is known only to a few researchers who have stumbled upon one in the company of a sensitive whilst exploring a ruin or a wreck. This is rare, to say the least.

OBSERVING THE ARTWORKS

When the Travellers first enter the base they will begin being exposed to the artworks. If one of the Travellers is a Droyne from a community that uses this method of information storage and conveyance, the Traveller experiences a confusing barrage of garbled information which cannot be processed. Operating in the base is a bit like being in a room filled with televisions all tuned slightly off-station and turned up to varying – and changing – degrees of loudness. The effect is distracting yet compelling, unpleasant and constant. Yusote's people were affected in this manner but are becoming used to it. Over several days of exposure the Traveller will become able to tune out the noise and receive it in a more coherent manner, though it would require weeks of exposure before the data started to make sense.

Non-Droyne for the most part see only swirly abstract art. A very small proportion of some species are sensitive to psionic triggers and may be affected in other ways. That percentage is a hard zero for species the Ancients did not modify, such as Aslan or Solomani humans, and tiny in all others. To determine if one of the Travellers is sensitive, have each of them roll 1D. If it comes up a 6, roll again. If the Traveller can roll 10 6s in a row, they are sensitive to the triggers. This is approximately a one in 60 million chance, which is higher than the actual percentage but will suffice for game purposes.

If a Traveller is sensitive to the triggers, they will feel no effects at first but begin to have disturbing dreams the first time they sleep. Flashes of weird landscapes and strange creatures, terrible events and what would be scenes of incredible mundanity did they not feature people from species the Travellers have never heard of. As the dreams become clearer the Traveller will begin to descend into madness. Fortunately for everyone involved, events at Twilight's Peak will alter this path.



TWILIGHT'S PEAK AND ENVIRONS

Twilight's Peak is a tall mountain, with main and secondary peaks rising high above the rocky plains. There is no sign of an installation until an entrance is found; no emissions to give any clue an Ancients site is present. Whilst impressive as a natural feature, there is nothing remarkable about this mountain other than the fact that its upper slopes are always in daylight on one side. If viewed from the right angle this gives the impression of a mountain-top hanging in the air.

The always-dark side of the mountain suffered a near-miss from a meteorite at some point in the last 50,000 years or so. The resulting crater is quite impressive. The base was not damaged but cracks opened up in some of the surrounding rocks. One of these permitted Mercedes and her companions to enter the installation. The Travellers have the means to access the normal entrances but may still use the fissure if they choose.

OUTER BASE (1)
The outer base is located more or less at the same level as the ground surrounding the mountain. This is the only part of the installation that can be reached from the outside, either by way of the intended entry points or fissures in the mountainside. Six long tunnels radiate out from the outer base, leading to concealed landing areas.

INNER BASE (2)
The inner base is located high within the mountainside and is reachable only by way of a grav-lift from the outer base or another located in the high docking area.

HIGH LANDING AREA (3)
A concealed landing area on a shoulder of the mountain was constructed for VIP transportation. It is self-contained, connecting to the inner base by a grav-lift.

MACHINERY SPACE (4)
Most of the installation's heavy machinery is located in a separate area well above the outer base. It can be reached by grav-lift.

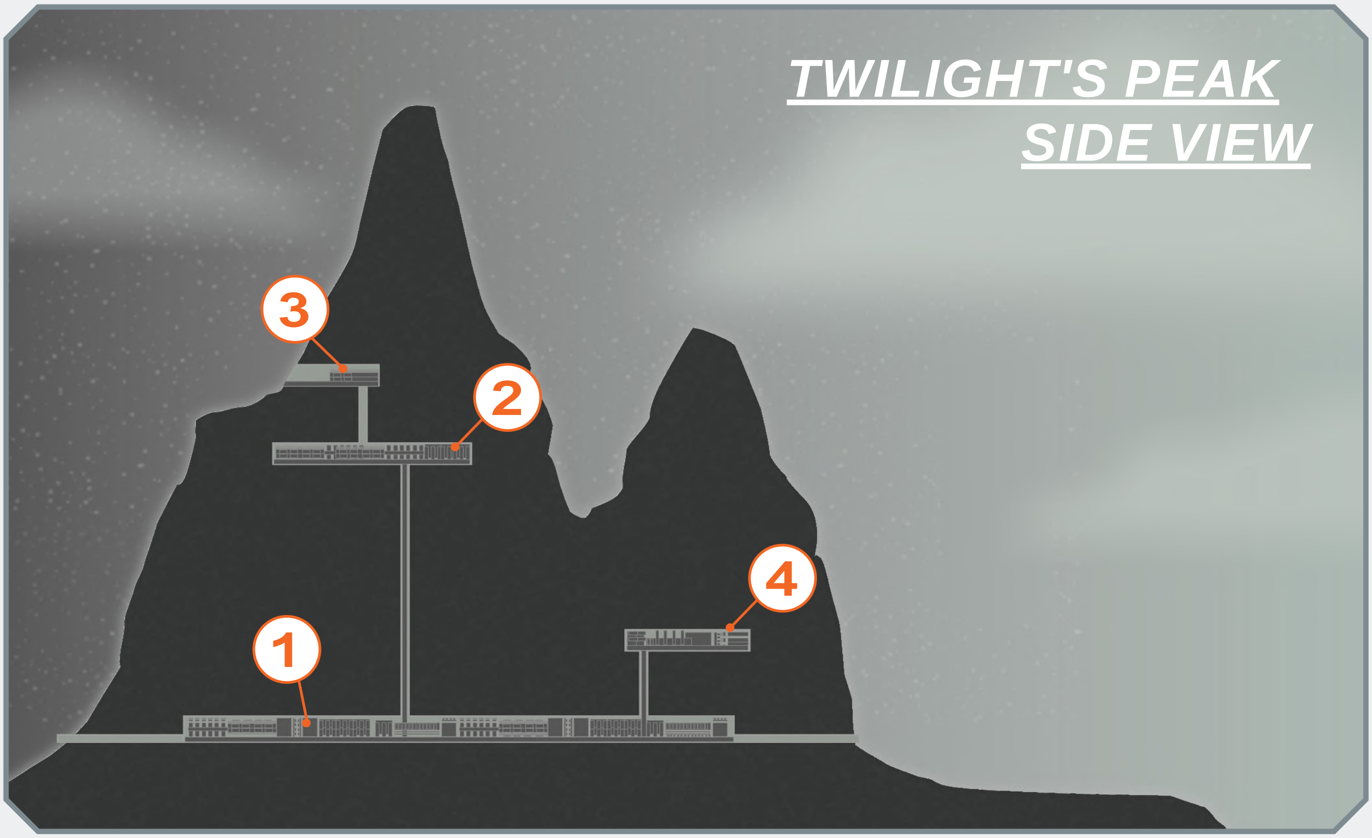
DOCKING AREAS (5)
Six concealed landing areas lie at the end of long tunnels radiating out from the central base. They are sunk into the bedrock and covered by a set of retractable doors which perfectly match the surrounding terrain.

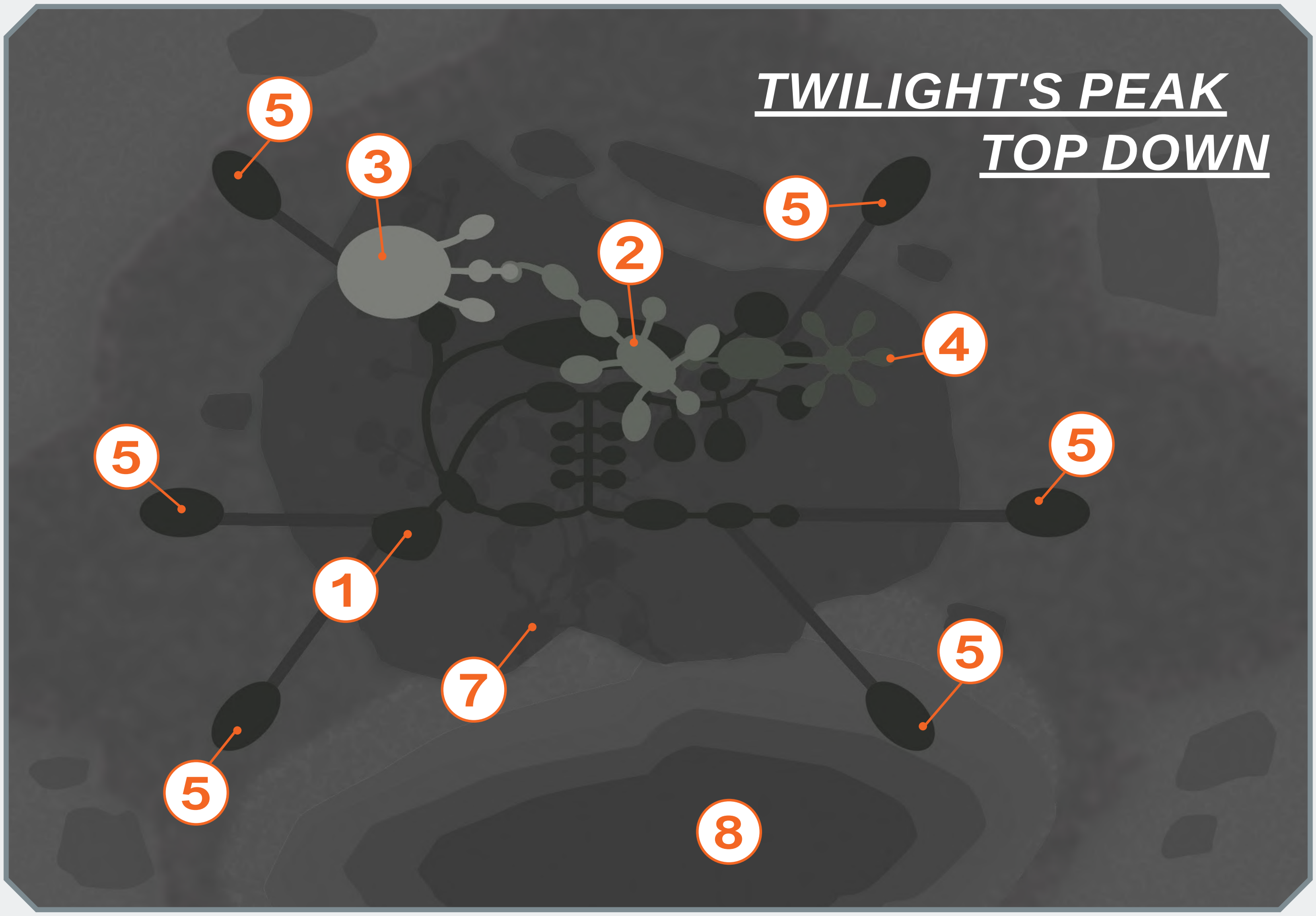
THE CRATER (6)
A huge impact crater on the dark side of the mountain bears witness to a meteor strike a few tens of thousands of years ago. It has the usual raised central area and an uneven floor, with many smaller craters dotted here and there. The walls of the crater are sharp and jagged but can be transited by a ground vehicle with some care.

FISSURES (7)
The meteorite impact caused cracks to open up in the mountainside at various points. Some are superficial or located in areas very difficult to get to. The largest set leads into a series of natural caverns in which the base was constructed.

THE CRATER AND THE FISSURES
If the Travellers investigate the crater they will find that for the most part it is a typical large-impact crater. The floor is of exposed rock, with areas of loose dust. The crater lies in permanent darkness, making it impossible for even the hardy Akenplant to colonise it. There are a few ridges and dips, and the odd deep ravine, but for the most part the floor is as navigable as the surface of any other trace-atmosphere world.

The canyon walls are steep and jagged, posing a hazard to anyone trying to climb up or down in a vacc suit. Most sections are impassable to ground vehicles but every few kilometres there is an area where the rim has crumbled. It is possible to predict where this might have occurred by observing nearby conditions of the rim and extrapolating with an Average (8+) Science (planetology) check. Driving an ATV up or down a natural ramp of this sort requires an Average (8+) Drive check.


TWILIGHT'S PEAK
SIDE VIEW
3
2
4
1


TWILIGHT'S PEAK
TOP DOWN
5
3
2
5
4
5
5
1
7
5
5
8

THE CENTRE

At the centre of the crater lies the impact point, where a large bolide of nickel-iron smashed down long ago. It was liquified by the impact and partially distributed over the surrounding surface, with a concentration at the impact point. The bolide might be worth extracting and purifying if someone with the right equipment wanted to make the effort, and it shows up on even basic instruments as a strong magnetic contact. If the Travellers get close enough to visually inspect the bolide they will find something very strange indeed.

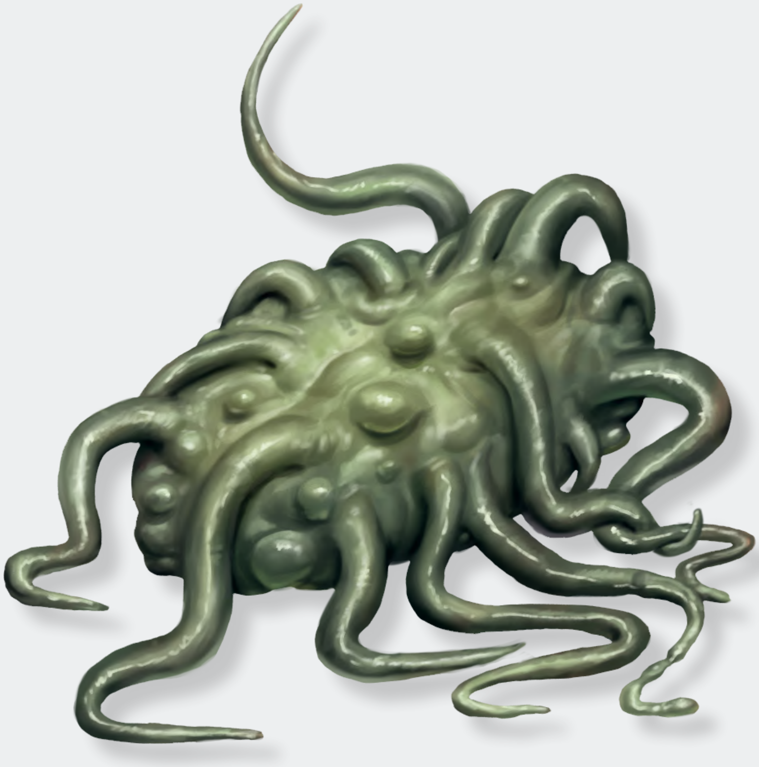
The ground rises towards the impact point, which is common in such craters, but there appears to be some form of biological life on the mound. It is generating a very small amount of gas, notably carbon monoxide and carbon dioxide, which makes it unlikely to be plant. In any case, most plants need light and this area never receives any. As the Travellers get closer they will see what it is.

On the mound are several… creatures. They resemble a central mass with large numbers of long and short tentacles, which appear to be dug into the ground. The creatures will be aware of a vehicle within 500 metres and people within 50 metres. They pull some of their tentacles out of the ground and begin waving them lazily back and forth, perhaps tasting or feeling the world's tiny envelope of atmospheric gas.

These masses are one of the experiments carried out at the installation over the past few years. By altering the process of creating a G482 creature from an immature Droyne, the scientists at the base have created an even worse abomination. This creature does not share the invisibility effect but can derive sustenance from radiation. The little these creatures receive is barely enough to keep them alive, especially since they are on the dark and cold side of the planet. However, they are able to fulfil their function. Their tentacles leach metals from the ground, enabling the creatures to act as organic mining platforms. The process is slow and inefficient but it does work after a fashion.

These creatures should have casted into Droyne but instead developed into a boneless mass of flesh eking out a desperate and painful existence on the cold side of the near-sterile planet. They are in pain and will eventually die. At first the scientists from the base visited the site, taking away some of the creatures for dissection to see what level of mineral absorption could be achieved. They have deemed their creations a failure in this role and simply left them to die.

The creatures will lash out at anyone coming within tentacle reach, which is about 5 metres for the larger ones. They will also begin to retract all their tentacles and lurch towards any source of heat or light they detect – in other words the Travellers and their vehicle. This is not really much of a threat; it is possible to stay ahead of these misshapen lumps of flesh at a steady walk. Even a brisk crawl will suffice. The Travellers do not have to fight the creatures unless they want access to the nickel-iron bolide for some reason, or they want a specimen to study. Exterminating the creatures might be a mercy, or the Travellers might just like killing stuff. Either way, there is nothing they can do for these unfortunate might-have-been-Droyne. They will die out here eventually, unwanted and forgotten by their creators.



Animal	Hits	Speed
Mineral Harvester	70	0.5m
Skills	Melee (natural) 1	
Attacks	Tentacle Bash (2D)	
Traits	—	
Behaviour	Filter	

As with G482, the composition of these creatures is such that most weapons are relatively ineffective. Penetrating attacks such as bullets and harpoons are reduced to D3s – so a firearm normally doing 3D-3 does only 3D3-3 damage. Most other attacks – including crushing implements and direct energy such as lasers, fire or electricity, apply a modifier of -1 per dice. So, a flame gun doing 5D damage does 5D-5 to G482. Cutting attacks do normal damage.

THE WRECK

The wreck of the corsair that attacked Mercedes and her crew and was downed by the defences at Twilight's Peak lies close to the fissures. There is little left of it other than its skeleton. Everything that could be salvaged has been stripped by successive crews of scavengers. Travellers familiar with starships might be able to work out the general lines of the ship, which identify it as a Vargr corsair. Much of the aft-port quarter is simply missing, with structural members cut off cleanly by some exotic weapon. The Travellers may or may not know it but this is the result of a partial hit with a disintegrator weapon.

Inside the ship's skeleton is a jumble of fragments and components the scavengers decided were not worth removing. The crippling disintegrator hit and subsequent crash onto the planetary surface smashed a lot of the ship and the scavengers threw everything they did not want into a heap in the middle. One of the creatures from the crater has made its way to the wreck and is trying to leach minerals out of it. Like the others it will attack anything that comes near enough.

THE FISSURES

There are multiple entry points into the mountain, some large enough for a couple of people to walk in side by side. Most are rather small however, requiring the Travellers to crawl or squeeze through a narrow point. This is not pleasant in a vacc suit, to say the least. Once inside, the Travellers will find a main group of more or less navigable cracks and natural caverns, with a great many branching shafts which either end within a few metres or are too narrow to enter at all.

The fissures run through a grainy, granite-like rock which has occasional pockets or cracks. Some particles in the walls are highly reflective, creating a glittering visual effect that can make it hard to judge distance. The fissures were opened up by tremors resulting from asteroid impact and have never been smoothed by air or water movement. The Travellers will trip up constantly unless they are very careful and will have to proceed slowly to avoid the chance of a suit rip.

BIG ENTRY CAVERN (1)

The widest entry point leads into a wide but low cavern, the ceiling is 1.2–1.8 m high. Travellers will have to crouch, crawl or butt-scoot through to tunnels coming out the other side. There are no stalactites in this area, since there is no water action to create them, but there are plenty of irregularities to snag a suit or jam an unwary Traveller in place.

SMALL ENTRY POINT (2)

The narrowest entry point requires Travellers to inch past projections and twist their bodies through into the wider tunnel beyond. This requires an Average (8+) DEX or Vacc Suit check. Anyone who fails will find themselves stuck. Wrenching free risks a small vacc suit tear, which can be avoided on a straight 2D roll of 8+. Alternatively, the Travellers might roleplay a solution to the problem. One option is for a colleague to gently tease the suit past the snag point. This takes time but is the most risk-free solution.

CAVERN ENTRY POINT (3)

A wide cave entrance gives access to a secondary chamber by way of a narrower neck. This is easily passable but the Travellers might be alarmed by the tumbled rocks scattered all over the floor. The cavern roof is reasonably stable now that the looser rocks have come out, but there is always a risk of something falling from above.

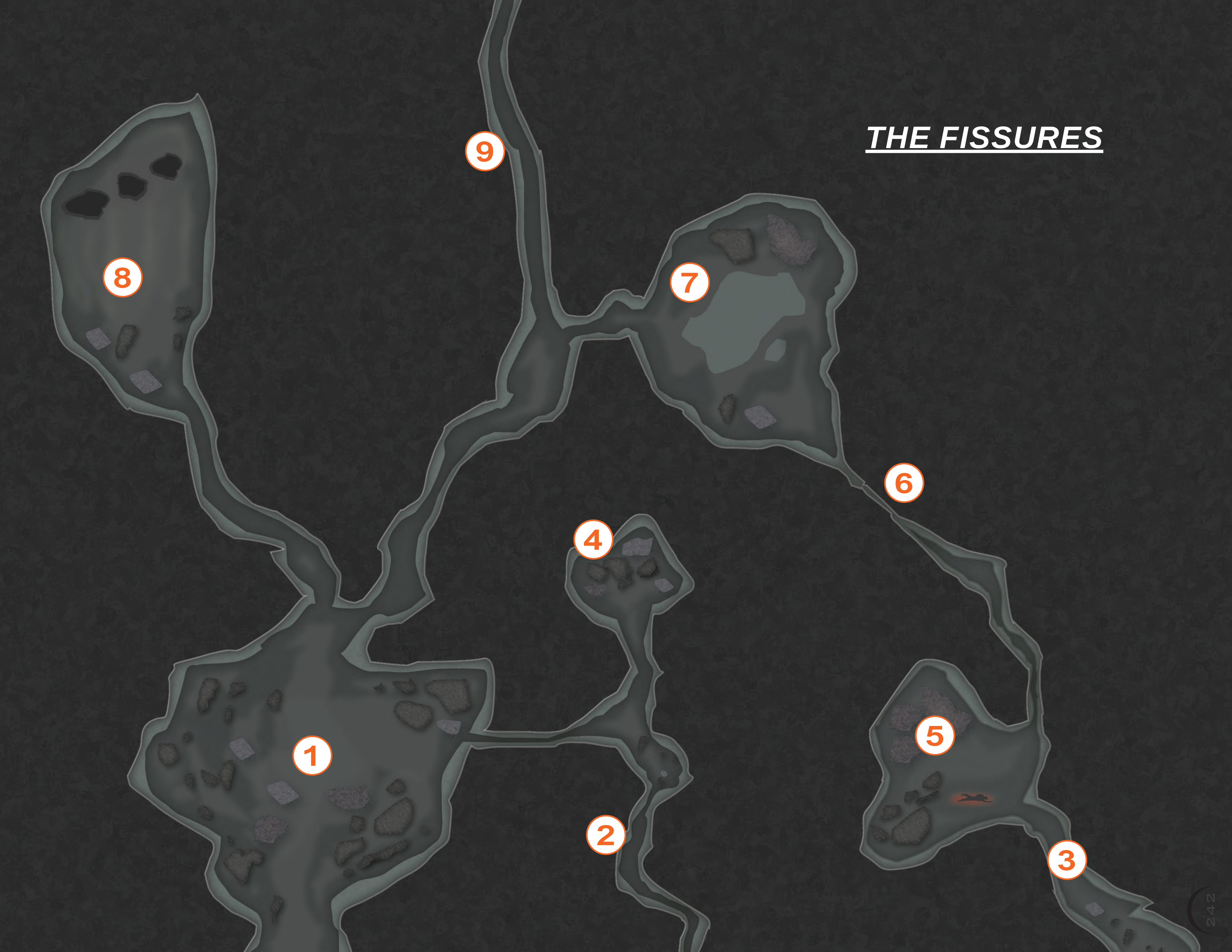
DEAD-END CAVERN (4)

This cavern is somewhat above the level of the entry point, with a tunnel sloping upwards into it. Tumbled rocks on the floor conceal deep cracks. They are not wide enough to fall into but an unwary Traveller might put a foot down one and fall, perhaps ending with one leg stuck. The walls of this cavern glitter more than usual. Inspection shows there are numerous small gemstones and gem-like minerals in the walls; mostly feldspar, zircon and garnet but the occasional diamond could be found if anyone wanted to search long enough.

LOW FLOOR CAVERN (5)

The floor drops sharply away from the entrance point towards a tunnel leading onwards. Numerous rocks have rolled into the centre of the chamber but they cannot disguise the corpse lying there. It is a Vargr, whose suit

THE FISSURES



was apparently torn. She seems to have been trying to crawl back to the entrance when her air ran out. She has a laser carbine and a wicked-looking knife which is clearly intended to snag and tear vacc suits. This is one of the corsairs who followed Mercedes into the fissures. She did not make it past the squeeze (6).

THE SQUEEZE (6)

The tunnel runs downward for a while then levels off before reaching a particularly narrow area of the tunnel. Squeezing through is accomplished in the same manner as at the entry point (3).

THE WET CAVERN (7)

The tunnel dips further past (6) and Travellers will notice tiny beads of moisture on their faceplates. The cavern ahead has a small amount of water seeping in from an aquifer somewhere. It has pooled in the centre, no more than 15 centimetres deep and every available surface is covered in fungi-like growths. The cavern is essentially an isolated ecosystem, basic as it is, unique in Charted Space. The Travellers may not realise this, nor that any bacteria they have brought in will change this system forever. Perhaps one of the more scientifically-inclined Travellers might be reminded that every interaction has an effect and even the most insignificant person or thing can influence a small part of the cosmos.

THE BOTTOMLESS CAVERN (8)

In the entry to this cavern lies a scattering of biological matter. Inspection shows that it is the remains of one of the creatures from the crater. The Travellers may be able to figure out it crawled all the way here in an effort to enter the caves, perhaps seeking to get into the base. How it knew where to go is a mystery; perhaps it sensed something or maybe it simply got lucky. Not too lucky, however; it expired here and was eaten by another of its kind.

The cavern floor slopes sharply downward from a point a few metres in. Unwary Travellers could slip and fall, in which case they will roll towards the far wall until they reach one of three sinkholes near that end. These are very deep – and slightly damp, although that is unlikely to be much concern. A Traveller can halt their roll or slide with an Average (8+) DEX check, or with assistance from someone else. As in other cases, a roleplayed solution is better than all the checks in the cosmos so Travellers who come up with a bold, workable and, above all, immediate plan should be rewarded with success.

THE WAY ONWARD (9)

The tunnel slopes down for a while, then levels out and begins to climb. The passage is wide enough for Travellers to walk comfortably but still rough and uneven underfoot. There are cracks and fissures to the sides but only one practicable path. Eventually the tunnel comes out into the natural cavern holding part of the Ancients base, however first the Travellers must negotiate two more obstacles. The first is another creature, almost dead despite the sustenance it obtained from eating another of its kind. It will try desperately but weakly to reach the Travellers and consume them. The creature is in such a pathetic state that the Travellers might actually feel bad about killing it but it will try to harm them if they just climb over it. There is no way around.

The final obstacle is a sudden drop of about six metres, followed by another of about double the height. The Travellers will need to contrive a way to get down safely and perhaps to get back up if they need to retrace their steps. The fissure walls are climbable at this point but doing so in a narrow, steeply sloping passageway, in a vacc suit and with just enough moisture to make the walls slippery… this all adds to the difficulty. An Average (8+) STR or DEX check is needed for every six metres the Traveller has to descend or ascend. If they fail, they may fall. This should be considered to occur at the midpoint of a segment – resulting in a three metres or nine metres fall.

Lydia’s low gravity is a help here. Travellers will suffer only a third of the normal damage from a fall, but any complications such as landing on jagged rocks will have the normal effect. Once past this impediment, the Travellers can proceed to the base entrance.

THE CAVERNS

When the installation was constructed its builders took advantage of natural cavern systems within the mountains. They were not connected at that time, but having space to move around and set up machinery made everything else much easier. The original entry point is now one of the radial tunnels leading out to the landing areas and until the meteorite impact the caverns had no connection to the outside world. Access to the caverns was rarely needed once the base was finished but the entry doors were maintained in working condition. The walls and roof throughout are the same as in the tunnels; granite-like igneous rock with the occasional sprinkling of small gemstones or semi-precious stones.

Emerging from the tunnels, the Travellers will be struck by the immensity of darkness around them. Their lights can only reach so far and there is an eerie feeling that they can be seen from much further away than their useful range. The cavern floor is mostly uneven natural rock but has clearly been smoothed around the structures in the centre of the cavern. Four ovoid, domed objects are connected by curving tubes of the same faintly-glowing material, with a fifth semi-ovoid lying against the rear wall of the cavern. There are no windows or projections on these structures and no immediate sign of an entry point.

ENTRY POINT (1)

The tunnel the Travellers have followed ends abruptly, emerging from the cavern wall about 12 metres up from the floor. There are climbing aids hammered into cracks in the rock – mundane mid-tech equipment available at any starport or world in the Imperium. The ropes associated with them have deteriorated in the decades since Mercedes' companions fixed them there. They may hold the weight of a careful Traveller, especially given the low gravity, but will disintegrate if multiple Travellers climb at once. twelve metres is not a great fall on a world like Lydia, but would be best avoided. The supports are strong enough to take new ropes and can be used as handholds and foot supports by more daring climbers.

THREE SINKHOLES AND A SHAFT (2)

Three large sinkholes in the cavern floor lead eventually to other caverns much deeper in the crust. A Traveller who fell in might have quite some time to contemplate the error before striking bottom – again this is due to low gravity, requiring longer to reach a dangerous velocity. All the same, a falling person would scrape down the sides and hit projections, and is certainly doomed unless someone comes up with a clever plan.

The sinkholes are linked by shafts, most of them natural. Some were bored using advanced machinery, as was the shaft. The Travellers may never find this out but the builders of the base used the shaft to gain access to deep caverns in order to explore them. Someone with a grav belt or a small platform could descend over a kilometre. In the deep caverns there is a little water and an isolated ecosystem similar to the one already found by the Travellers. There are also seams of metal and gem beds, neither of which seem to have interested the builders.

THE ENTRY STRUCTURE (3)

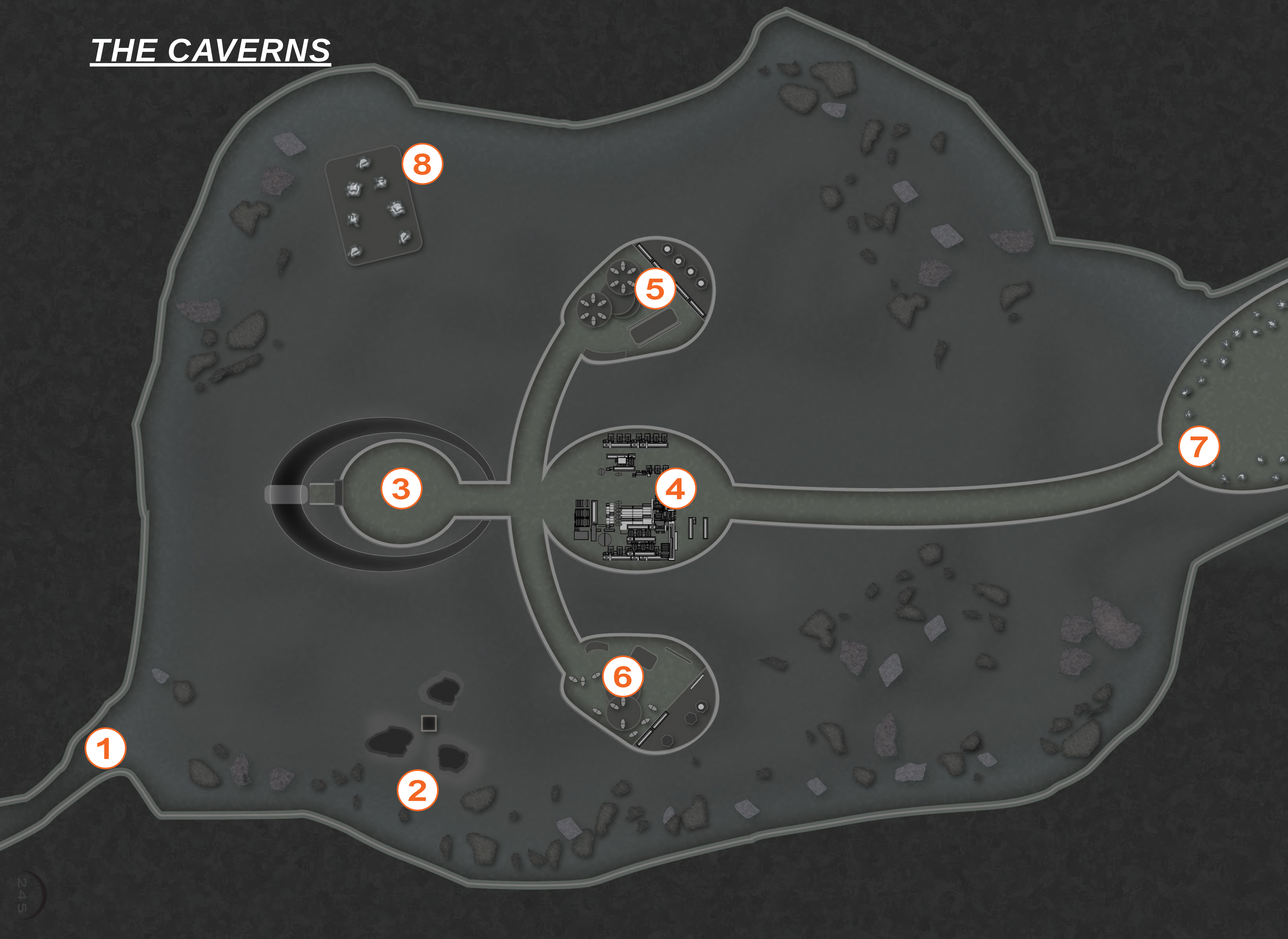
The ovoid shape of this structure is incomplete, ending in a set of slab-like doors. A roadway, or something resembling one, extends from the doors to the edge of an obviously artificial 'moat' cut around the entire building. The access tube at the rear of the structure bridges this moat, which is exactly 62.847 metres deep and 9.239 metres wide. It is obviously intended to keep out unwelcome visitors and it has succeeded. The body of a Vargr corsair lies at the bottom on the inward side. Apparently she tried to jump the gap and fell in. The smooth, fusion-cut sides offered no chance of climbing out and either she died of injuries or her air ran out. Travellers with a strong sense of empathy might wonder if her lights still worked, or did she die the loneliest of deaths in darkness? The body, like the others found so far, dates from the occasion Mercedes and her people entered the installation.

If the Travellers have the gem Mercedes gave them, their entry problem is solved – although it might not be that apparent at first. At the end of the roadway a bright beam of light suddenly stabs out, striking the lip of the 'moat' just a few centimetres below the edge. This is the 'light bridge' the poem mentions. It can support any amount of weight the Travellers are likely to place on it and remains activated whilst there is someone on it. The bridge is also activated by anyone standing on the roadway inside the 'moat'.

At the same time the light bridge activates the slab-like doors swing open, revealing an ovoid chamber inside. This is lit but has no air pressure until the doors close again. An inner door every bit as solid as the outer one opens once the pressure in the chamber is suitable. It is not clear where air is coming from as there are no obvious ducts or grilles. If the Travellers investigate that they will find that air (and water, and other substances) are moved in pipes located within the walls and can diffuse through wall panels. The process that makes a solid looking panel air or water permeable without changing its appearance is beyond the understanding of even TL15 scientists.

The entry chamber is otherwise completely devoid of features and furniture. The Travellers will probably experiment with the walls and floor, trying to figure out if there are controls hidden somewhere or to get a feel for how grippy the floor is despite looking very smooth. This chamber is an opportunity for the Referee to describe sights, lack-of-smells and other features of the installation. After this, the occasional reminder may be useful but the Referee will for the most part be free to concentrate on what is happening or specific details rather than the general features of the place.

THE CAVERNS



MACHINERY SPACE (4)

This large ovoid chamber once held machinery used to expand the cavern, cut the moat into the bedrock and similar tasks. It has long since been moved elsewhere, leaving an oddly empty space. This may puzzle the Travellers if they think what they have seen is the whole of the base, and may serve as a clue to the existence of many more chambers elsewhere.

DWELLING AREA (5)

This area served as a dwelling space for the workers building the installation. Once no longer needed it was shut down but remains in working order. There are two circles of sleeping pods, a furnished area with eating surfaces and a fresher block at the back of the chamber.

The Travellers might want to play around with the facilities. They work perfectly, of course. Sitting down at an eating position activates a holographic projection of various symbols. Trying to touch one activates it, resulting in a hologram of food or drink appearing on the eating surface. Another touch confirms the choice, causing the surface to configure itself as a suitable receptable and dispense eating tools. Touching the food or drink triggers an internal teleportation device which places the chosen meal on the surface.

The food is edible but since this was a facility for mere workers the menu is not impressive. Various grey porridge-like dishes are on offer, with a variety of odd-looking vegetables or strips of something resembling oatcakes. The food is highly nutritious and tailored to the metabolism of whoever sits down, providing they are of a species recognised by the Ancients. Humans, Droyne and Vargr are perfectly catered for but the system will have to take a guess at the needs of Aslan, K'Kree, Hivers or other species that were never associated with the Ancients.

DWELLING AREA (6)

This area is similar to the one at (5), with the exception of some damage to one of the eating stations. Someone has bashed it with something hard and heavy, over and over, and succeeded in distorting the top. No wiring or piping can be seen in the damaged part; the whole thing seems to be solid.

RECEPTION CHAMBER (7)

This large chamber protrudes partly from the cavern wall but was mostly built into it. The walls are of the same material as everywhere else in the base, just encased in rock. The chamber has a great many statues dotted about, apparently at random. About 70% depict Droyne or creatures much like them, with the rest mostly human and Vargr. The latter two always seem to be in subordinate positions. A few are cringing or in similar attitudes of fear, and some are apparently incomplete. If the Travellers look hard enough they will find what appear to be Droyne Warriors in action poses here and there. Some have devices that are obviously weapons of a conventional sort, whilst others are holding some form of equipment. Someone who knows how to read a statue group of this sort can figure out that most of the people are doing work as they should whilst a rebellious few are being disintegrated by loyal Warriors.

STATUE GROUP (8)

This group of statues is carved from stone, or more accurately a great rock pillar was disintegrated away to leave them. Depicted are seven Droyne-like creatures, all looking up and away into the distance. The outer six are cringing a little but the central one stands tall,

REFEREE'S NOTES

This part of the base was not needed after it became operational and was generally ignored. Mercedes and her team passed through here and 'experimented' with the eating station before heading deeper into the complex. Some of the raiders (the 'wolves' in the poem) followed them in. Traces of their passing have for the most part been removed by Yusote's party, who are trying to figure out exactly what happened in this place. Transitory evidence such as bloodstains has been cleaned up by automated systems – a stain on a wall will just fade and disappear within a few hours.

If the Travellers search they will find a few pieces of evidence that were not cleared up by Yusote's people. There are a few flattened bullets which clearly made no impression on whatever they hit, cartridge cases, odd bits of vacc suit repair tape and patches, and similar items dropped in odd corners. Anything the size of a soup can or larger was removed by Yusote's people.

proud and unafraid. These statues were created after the installation was abandoned, honouring those who remained behind to seal and preserve it. There are clues to this elsewhere in the installation.

OUTER BASE UPPER LEVEL

The 'outer' base is functional and is currently occupied by Yusote's crew. They arrived at one of the landing areas which opened for them, allowing a long transit through the tunnels into the main part of the installation. This is currently set to allow anyone within access to basic systems such as food and sanitation. Doors will open automatically unless there is a good reason not to, such as a fire raging on the other side.

Yusote's crew have explored this level but have, for the most part, not messed with systems or removed many objects. Yusote would prefer the Travellers to remain in this part of the base as much as possible but will not – initially at least – object to their presence in the lower level.

ENTRY POINT (1)

The Travellers' point of entry from the cavern structures is through this area, which is the Reception Chamber described on page 263. If Yusote is aware of the Travellers' presence, which is quite likely, he withdraws his crew ahead of the Travellers and try to avoid contact until he has had a chance to observe them. Whilst Yusote is not pleased at having interlopers in 'his' base he will be diplomatic at first, hoping to enlist assistance rather than enter into a needless conflict. He hopes to make contact on his terms, when he is ready, to maximise his diplomatic advantage.

GUARD CHAMBER (2)

This chamber is almost entirely featureless. Its bare, flat floor has two raised areas at each end, like an extended speakers' dais or pulpit, or a weirdly curved shop counter. In fact these are hard cover for guards protecting the entrance and resilient as a structural wall. A control on the inside of each activates a defensive system. The floor turns orange as long as the control is held and emits a weak disintegrator field. This will do one point of damage per round to anyone in contact with it. Strong footwear like good boots or a vacc suit will take three points of damage to destroy but a suit will be compromised after taking two points. It is not likely this post will be staffed when the Travellers arrive. Yusote is not expecting trouble and other occupants of the base are not unduly concerned with interlopers wandering around the outer base.

WORKING CHAMBER (3)

The original function of this chamber was a workplace where small, technical items were put together, repaired or modified. What appears to be a featureless counter runs around the walls everywhere there is not a door, with a raised dais in the centre. A supervisor would have stood here, overseeing the tasks of workers. If a Traveller stands in the right place, a workstation is activated. There are no obvious signs as to what is the right place; Workers would know where their station was to the millimetre and needed no markings. It is possible to figure out the layout of stations by estimating distances around from the doors, based on the average size of a Droyne Worker.

An active workstation shows holographic images of various objects and devices, which can be manipulated by moving hands or other appendages in the hologram. Fine work is accomplished by expanding the image, effectively zooming in on a desired area. Since the Travellers have no idea how to make Ancients devices they cannot produce anything useful but trial and error might result in a section of a device or a misshapen lump of metal being produced. This will appear in a reception area on the overseer's dais.

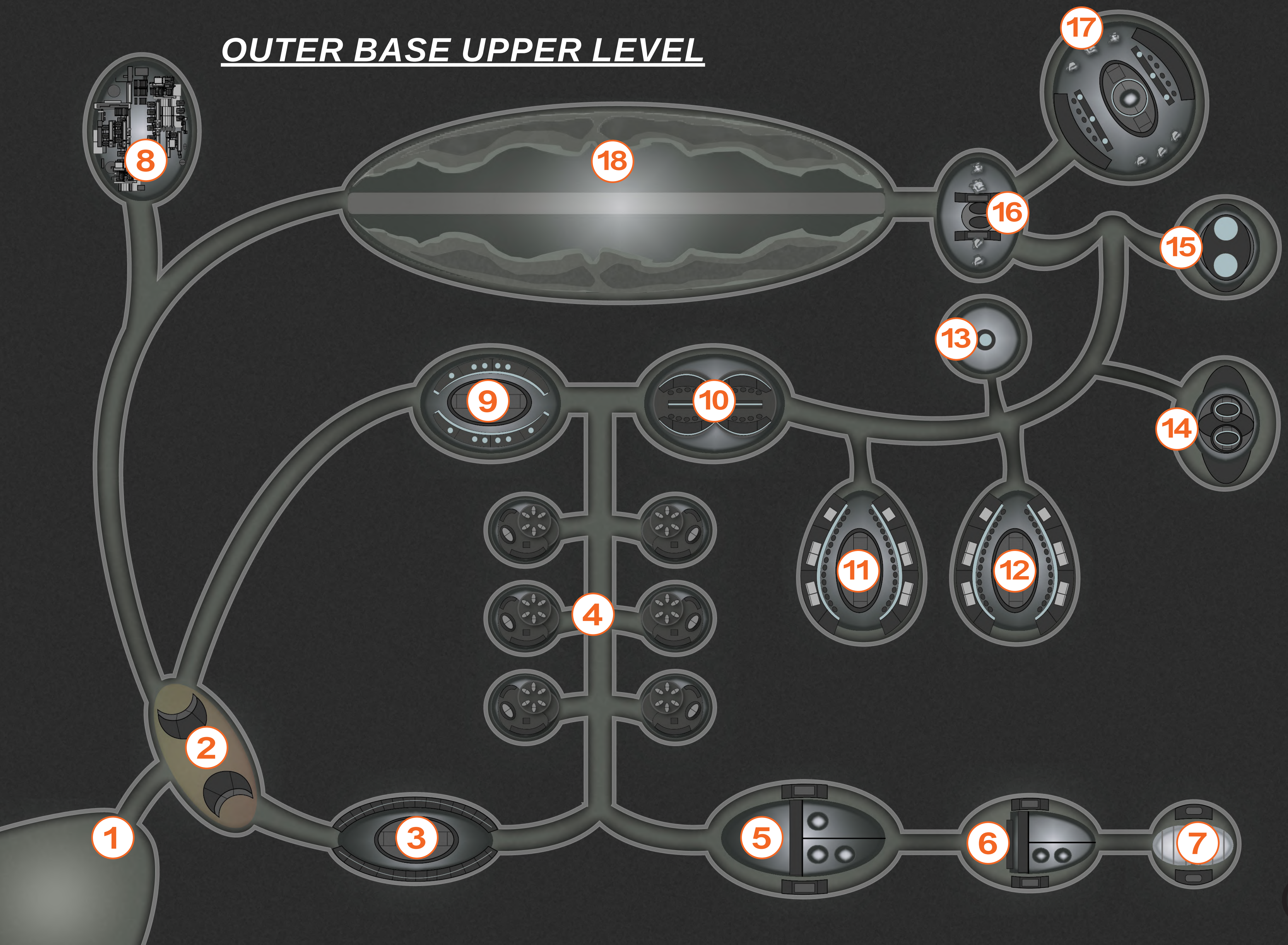
LIVING CHAMBER (4)

Six living chambers, each with six sleeping pods, provided accommodation for the base's servitor staff in ages past. Yusote has begun keeping some of his crew permanently in the base, using these pods, although he retires to his ship as is right and proper. It is unlikely the Travellers will find sleeping Droyne but they might spot one or two hurriedly leaving the chamber and a pod closing behind them.

FIRST CHAMBER OF DISTANT ACCESS (5)

This large chamber has three broad discs of pure silver marked on the floor, and several devices stood neatly in recesses on the walls. The devices have two handles at the top of an impossibly fragile looking – but very strong – frame which ends in a short projection. Gripping the handles activates a grav support field and causes the base plate to extend to any distance up to 3.6 metres. these are, essentially, gravitic wheelbarrow/forklifts. The base plate will raise and lower once the controls are figured out, enabling heavy objects to be carried with relative ease. However, whilst the grav field lifts, the object carried still has inertia. Control can be tricky and a certain amount of physical strength is required.

OUTER BASE UPPER LEVEL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On the opposite wall is a set of recesses which once contained life support suits. These were plundered by Mercedes and her crew. Now only one remains. It is a functional version of the one Blanca has but is proportioned for a Droyne rather than a human. The main components could be jury-rigged into a human suit.

TRAVELLERS BEING WHO THEY ARE…

It is possible to stand on the base plate facing the wrong way, activate the controls for the grav field and attempt to conduct a desperate grav-borne rescue or just zip about the base with reckless abandon and very little control.

This information is offered without comment.

The three discs are teleporters, leading to stowage areas located somewhere else. Two are powered down now and currently non-functional. Whether this means the destination no longer exists or no longer has the ability to receive is an open question. At one time these teleporters were used for general logistics, enabling the base to be supplied without having to bring anything through the landing pads. The third leads to a receiver chamber somewhere with very low gravity, perhaps beneath the surface of an asteroid.

There are two exits from this chamber, or rather there used to be. One is sealed by heavy doors, the other by distorted walls. It appears the facility was hit by very powerful weapons, leaving only this chamber. The doors at one end cannot be opened due to damage. The others will open if an override can be triggered somehow but they lead into a section of tunnel which is open to vacuum at the far end. The remainder of the asteroid is simply… gone. The installation is on its last dregs of power and cannot replace stale air or power. It is bitterly cold and anyone without breathing gear will start to suffocate within a few minutes. The doors will show a weak and distorted holographic projection of what is beyond to anyone trying to open them.

SECOND CHAMBER OF DISTANT ACCESS (6)

This chamber is similar to the first one but has only two teleporters. One is powered down but the other glows faintly. Anyone venturing through this one finds themselves on a circular plinth in the middle of a swampy forest. The atmosphere is dense and uncomfortable to breathe. Large creatures can be seen through the trees, tearing vegetation up as they wander slowly.

This location is a distant world on the fringes of Charted Space. The Travellers could survive there, perhaps someday getting picked up by a passing starship and making their way back to the Spinward Marches. This might be a last-chance escape route if things go very badly wrong at Twilight's Peak. Yusote has sent a party through to explore the swamp but all they found was more swamp, more trees and several types of dangerously territorial creatures.

CHAMBER OF UNKNOWN PURPOSE (7)

An oval chamber with exits in its long faces, this chamber has depressions in the floor at each end. Yusote's people have not figured out what they are for but have learned that stepping onto one is highly dangerous. Anyone doing so will begin to slowly sink through the metal as if in quicksand. Self-rescue is tricky but might be accomplished with a Difficult (10+) STR or DEX check. A second person, unless spectacularly inept, can pull a victim out without difficulty.

Left alone, the victim will slowly sink through the metal floor without apparently coming to harm. The depression at one end deposits the Traveller in a slurry of biological matter, in which a person will slowly sink and drown. Rescue is still possible – someone else can force an arm through the metal floor and support the sinking Traveller, hand them a rope or whatever other plan they have come up with. The other receptor deposits the victim in a chamber full of scrap metal fragments and lumps of rock. In both cases the matter is very slowly being disintegrated into its constituent atoms. These are used in the base for various purposes ranging from creating food to fabricating tools.

MACHINERY SPACE (8)

This chamber has no furnishings but is filled with neatly stacked machinery and components which have been moved from somewhere else. It is stored in a lightweight framework of tubes and rods resembling a modular shelving system. Most of the machinery is large and bulky, and its function might not be very obvious. In fact this equipment was used to construct the entry area structures and carve the cavern out for the rest of the base. There are extruders for the metal that forms the walls of the installation, which is apparently shaped in a malleable semi-liquid form before being set by some process beyond the ken of TL15 science.

Most of this equipment is bulky and at least partially dismantled but there are a few items the Travellers could perhaps make use of or otherwise come into contact with. The first is a six-legged drone about half a metre long, resembling a metallic spider. This variant has no manipulator arms but can project a disintegration/manipulation field within a metre of its centre. These drones are used to flatten areas or cut tunnels into rock, and smooth the metallic wall material into place. Those in the machinery space are stored in a powered-down state but could be reactivated at need.

Most of the other equipment is of unknown function but there is a set of what appears to be metal cylinders a few centimetres in diameter and about 32 centimetres long. One end is the usual silvery grey and flattened off but the other is a bright golden yellow and ends in a spike. When slammed hard into a surface, this spike briefly disintegrates all it touches, becoming firmly jammed in any hard surface. It then extrudes a powerful forcefield at a distance up to 3.5 metres from the other end of the rod. This can be used to support a weak roof or assist in construction work… or perhaps the Travellers can think of something else to do with the rods.

Among the neatly ordered crates are some of the items Mercedes and her crew stockpiled, still waiting for use. The crew grabbed all the antimatter batteries they could take but one remains. There are also cylinders of gel which give up oxygen when fitted into a vacc suit. Each cylinder is good for over 30 hours of normal activity but is only 22 centimetres long and nine centimetres wide. Among the loose items is an improvised survival helmet, with three air cylinders attached to a cape-like rectangle of cloth which may once have been part of someone's clothing.

CHAMBER OF MUNDANE PURPOSES (9)

This chamber was essential to the functioning of the base but at the same time extremely mundane. Its machinery dispensed clothing and similar items to base personnel. It is still functioning and will automatically adjust to the measurements and general body form of any user. The standard garment is either a loose robe or a jumpsuit, with belts and sashes containing many pockets as an accessory. Colours will be silver-grey and variants unless the Travellers learn to make skilled use of the machinery.

CHAMBER OF TECHNICAL PURPOSES (10)

This chamber looks like other working areas but appears to have been used for heavier tasks such as maintenance of drones. Two transport drones are powered-down in recesses, with much of the rest of the chamber taken up with what appear to be cradles designed to support machinery or drones during maintenance.

WORKING CHAMBER (11/12)

Two near-identical chambers were once used by the base staff to carry out their tasks. These appear to have been lighter tasks such as administration, communications or fabrication of minor technical items. The chamber is now empty and sterile.

GLOBE CHAMBER (13)

This chamber is entirely empty other than a plinth in the centre. When anyone approaches, a holographic display of Lydia appears, rotating slowly against a starry backdrop in real time. Simple interactions with the globe are accomplished by touching it, moving a hand within the hologram, or by patterns of movement. It is possible to zoom in on any part of the planet, even deep within the crust. The only area blocked out is the mountain; that requires some kind of access privileges.

The globe will also display other star systems, although without context it is not easy to figure out what is there and there is little detail beyond geographical features. The data is old and has not been updated since the era of the Ancients. So, looking at Earth shows the land as it was 300,000 years ago, with some extrapolation for elapsed time. Tribes of primitive humans are shown, roving over a landscape that has clearly never seen technology or industry. This is the last known data on Earth and other systems are similarly out of date. Some are unidentifiable, depicting thriving societies which are now long vanished.

CHAMBER OF ASCENT (14)

This circular chamber contains only a wide grav-lift shaft. It goes up to the machinery spaces above and does not connect to the inner base. Halfway up is a sudden wider area, enabling the Travellers to step off the lift pads. The wider area is walled the same as the rest of the base but the walls slide back to provide access to the rock beyond. There are cracks and fissures, into which some kind of scientific instruments have been inserted. Some can be reached by wriggling into a fissure, others were placed by drones. They monitor the stresses in the rock of the mountain.

CHAMBER OF DESCENT (15)

This circular chamber contains a grav-lift shaft giving access to the level below. Using it is not for the faint-hearted; although it is composed of the same apparently solid white light as other lifts and bridges, stepping out over the shaft is still a frightening experience. The lift springs into life when someone approaches, taking the form of a disc of light which takes up about 20% of the shaft. Once someone is on the disc it moves away from the entry point and begins to descend. The next person will be then furnished with a disc. There seems to be no pattern to where the disc positions itself in the shaft and during descent (or ascent) it will also move from side-to-side. This results in ascending and descending discs rushing straight at one another then smoothly sliding past with a minimum of sideways movement. The chamber leads to the entry to the lower level.

COMMAND ANTECHAMBER (16)

Most base staff would not be permitted in the command chamber and would instead receive their instructions by way of a messenger or telepathic command. This chamber is designed for the proper reception of such commands, with décor and statues designed to focus the mind properly. The first time the Travellers enter this chamber they will feel a strange sense of disorientation lasting a few seconds, followed by a feeling that something has changed. They will not be able to put their finger on exactly what it is, however.

COMMAND CHAMBER (17)

This large circular chamber has a raised dais in its very centre, with a smaller dais above it. Here, the commander of the base would stand above all others, overseeing operations with a ring of sub-commanders or perhaps armed guards on the level below. Statues, mostly of Droyne, are scattered about the chamber, with a shelf-like structure around the outside. This is in fact a set of command stations controlling essential functions such as life support and power management. A Traveller who figured out how to use the correct console would be able to grant access to the inner part of the base.

Yusote has naturally claimed this chamber as his command centre and rarely leaves it other than to return to his ship. His guards will prevent anyone fiddling about with controls but can be distracted when he is not present. They will prevent anyone from ascending to the top level of the command dais, using force if necessary. This is more symbolic than practical – the base is operated from floor level with the commander simply standing around issuing orders and looking important.

FLYING CHAMBER (18)

This large chamber has a very high ceiling and a deep bowl for a floor, with a central light bridge for anyone who wants to walk across it. Unlike the rest of the base it has variable gravity and air pressure, and a variety of posts and ledges creating an artificial forest or cliff environment. These can be made more realistic with a holographic representation surrounding each. The chamber can be used by Droyne (or any other creatures) capable of flight, or the gravity can be turned right down to create a low-G exercise area or playground.

OUTER BASE LOWER LEVEL

This area is accessed from the landing areas or the upper level of the outer base. It contains machinery and equipment that keeps the installation running along with features connected with the experiments and work undertaken here in the distant past. Yusote would prefer the Travellers not to enter this level but will not stop them. At least initially, he hopes to gain their cooperation.

CHAMBER OF ASCENT (1)

The lower level is accessed by way of a shaft from the upper level. Travellers descending from (15) on the level above will arrive here. The floor of the shaft is flat and even but slightly lower than the surrounding chamber to enable a seamless step onto a grav platform.

BIOLOGICAL LABORATORY (2)

The biolab consists of three linked chambers. The outer one is similar to most of the other workshops and control areas, with a central dais and workstations around the walls. Here, most small technical work and analysis was done and most importantly presentations were made to the chamber's leader before the results were placed before the overall base commander.

The second chamber is subdivided into airlocked experimentation areas and is airlocked again at the entrance. Travellers entering may be doused in decontamination fluid which almost instantly dries into small, almost weightless crystals. These are somehow attracted back into the walls, taking with them any contaminants and possibly some patches of facial hair. Within the area are six experimentation areas, of which four could be said to be of use. The others are spotless and empty.

The Live Creature: Yusote's crew have managed to capture one of the creatures from the crater and penned it here. It is regaining strength now that sufficient warmth and energy are available and could at some point pose a threat to the installation. The experimentation area is very strong, so the most likely escape scenario is either deliberate or an accident resulting from someone not realising the creature can move a lot more quickly now. If it gets out it will need to feed and will not stop until it runs out of organic matter.

The Dead Creature: Yusote's crew found a dead specimen in the deep-cryo unit and got it out to take a look. They have a lot of questions for the Travellers if they indicate they know anything and will share what they know about it in return. That is not much; as yet Yusote is not aware of the creature's origins.

The Dead Vargr: One of the Vargr corsairs encountered by Mercedes was killed in the installation's doorway by a G482 creature released from stasis to get rid of the intruders. What was left of him was put into a stasis unit. Curious about his presence and what happened to him, Yusote and his crew got him out and are examining the remains. These are clawed and chewed up in a manner that might be familiar to the Travellers.

The Mess of Tissue: One of the experimentation areas contains an amorphous mass of tissue. It has no discernible limbs but there are vestigial organs within. These are not enough to keep it alive; the machinery in the installation has been doing so ever since the facility was abandoned. Yusote has no idea what this could be but the Travellers might figure it out. It is an experimental variant of the G482 creature which went wrong. Tissue regeneration and advanced machinery have resulted in a near-immortal mass of flesh with no purpose.

A bank of heavily reinforced cryo-stasis pods dominates the third chamber. There are 18 of them. Five are open and empty; the others are sealed. These have defied Yusote's attempts to get them open and will resist the Travellers at first. There are no windows to look in and instruments (if they can be interpreted at all) produce confusing responses. It would seem there is something in each of the 13 remaining pods, alive and in stasis. Beyond that little can be discerned at this time and no means to open the pods can be found. In fact, there are controls that would do so but they are locked into inactivity from the inner base. This will not be immediately apparent; the controls simply seem inert. These pods will come to life during the final phase of the struggle for Twilight's Peak. If they are allowed to complete their cycle the contents will emerge. Some are misshapen monsters that cannot survive long but the others are fully slaughter-ready G482s. They will start killing everyone they encounter and feeding on the corpses.

GEM WORKSHOP (3)

This specialist workshop is used to produce various gem-like objects, each with a specialist purpose. They are built at a molecular level by the machinery in this chamber, typically taking 3D hours for a single gem. The functions the Travellers have encountered, notably the radiation sinks, could be replicated by someone who knows how. Developing this level of finesse would take months, even after the controls of the machines are figured out, but a rather crude and basic function gem can be created by someone with a more general understanding of the system. There are six machines in the room, each capable of making one gem at a time. After figuring out the controls a Traveller can set the machine to produce gems with one of the following functions.

Personal Shield, Energy: The gem projects a field which absorbs and dissipates energy weapons fire. It has no effect on dangerous radiation or disintegrator weapons, only focused energy such as lasers and microwave beams. The shield has Protection +2D+2. Any energy weapon striking the shield which does equal to or less than the damage threshold is fully absorbed. A hit for a greater amount lets half of the remaining damage through and reduces Protection by -1. When it reaches Protection +0 the gem crumbles into dust.

Personal Shield, Kinetic: This gem has a similar effect but against impacts including projectiles, falls and hand weapons. It has Protection +3D. Hits for this amount of damage or less are fully absorbed. Greater damage penetrates the shield completely. The shield's Protection is reduced by -1 every time damage is absorbed by it.

Personal Shield, Disintegrator: This personal protection device completely negates any hit by a disintegrator weapon on a 2D check resulting in 4+. On 3- the shield collapses and the gem crumbles. On a straight 2 the gem explodes, delivering 2D damage to the user. Checks are made separately for every disintegrator hit, even if there are several in the same round. If the user is standing in a disintegrator field for some reason, checks are made every round.

PHYSICAL LABORATORY (4)

This was at one time a physical sciences laboratory and workshop. It has a central dais for its commander to use, although a much lower one than in the control chamber. The staff were studying the planet they were on, along with the remainder of the system. A number of robotic probes were active in the distant past, orbiting various bodies or crawling across their surfaces; globes are projected above the workstations, allowing Travellers to view the surface and subsurface of these bodies. Probe positions and data are last-knowns; most or all of the probes will have been lost in the past few millennia. However, the Travellers might be able to pick up a feed from a surface probe still dragging itself across the surface of an outsystem comet. It has probably been circumnavigating the object over and over since its last commands were received. Another probe appears to be upside-down at the bottom of a body of some liquid. This is probably a liquid pocket on an outsystem moon, deep below the surface in an area warmed by volcanic vents. It still dutifully sends information packets every 29.465 hours.

The laboratory also apparently had a military or security role. The same displays showing rock formations and gas composition can be configured to show likely landing spots, ships or other objects detected in orbit and similar information. A wealth of security data on Lydia itself is available, including projections of the effects of various weapons striking different points on the planet. The Travellers could amuse themselves dropping rocks of various sizes on the installation from orbit, although there is no way to make it happen from this chamber.

DRONE WORKSHOPS (5) AND TELEPORTER (6)

These chambers were used to build drones as needed by the base. They were then moved to the drone storage area. Some were sent away on missions to other parts of the system or supplied to other bases. The rest just… waited. Raw materials were sent by teleporter from a repository somewhere else; probably far away, and when the base was abandoned supplies kept coming for a while. Drones were built and stored until supplies ran out, at which point the drones assigned to move components and finished machines powered down and waited for further orders.

There were about a dozen drones in this area when Yusote arrived, paused where they had been millennia ago. His crew have reactivated two and are trying to reprogram them but have achieved only intermittent and partial success. Two more have been dismantled, quite forcibly, and lie on work surfaces surrounded by tools. The rest are still where they stopped, typically in awkward places where they can be tripped over.

DRONE STORAGE (7)

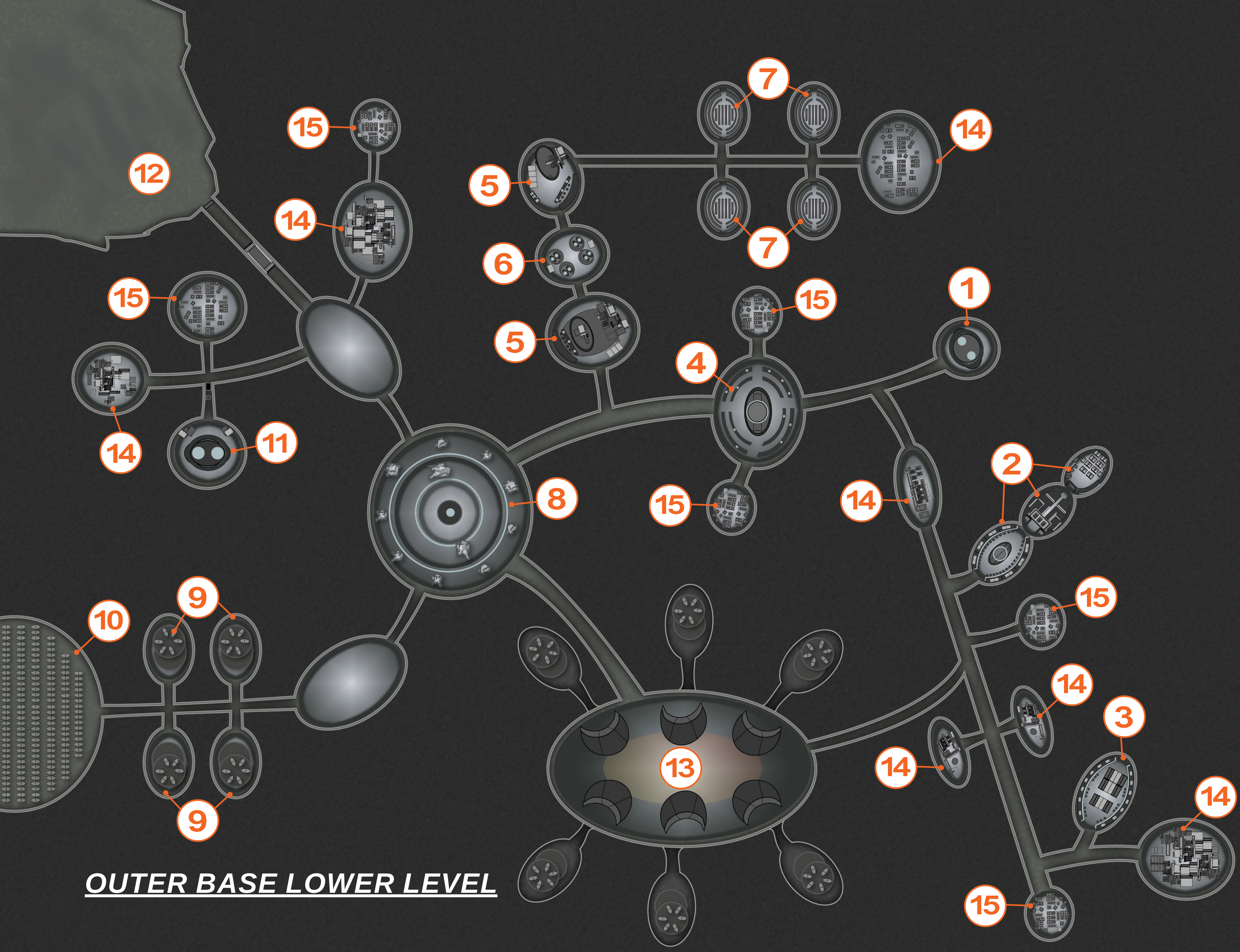
The chambers were used to store completed drones and their accessories. There are racks of them, dozens or perhaps hundreds, all in an inert state. If mass-activated, the drones will all try to climb out of their racks in a frenzy of waving appendages. A few will make it and then be instructed to either arm themselves and defend the chamber, or free other drones. Once there is a reasonable garrison of drones in the chamber, parties will be sent out to take control over the base. However, at the point the Travellers first arrive, the drones are inactive.

ROBOTIC DRONES

The original constructors of the facility generally preferred biological servitors to robotic ones, including people and biological robots such as G482. They did make some use of electromechanical robots, however. These were probably common designs within the civilisation of the Ancients and may be encountered elsewhere.

The basic form used by all robots in Twilight's Peak is the same; a hexagonal body fitted with various appendages. A propulsion unit is attached underneath by placing it adjacent to the body. The two then join seamlessly by unknown means but can be separated by someone who knows how to command the parts to release. An accessory pack fits on top if desired. Arms can also be added, bearing various tools. There is an attachment point in the centre of each of the six outer faces, although it is invisible until an arm is brought close by. Components can quicky be swapped around to create drones for whatever purpose may be needed.

OUTER BASE LOWER LEVEL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LEG MODULE

The leg module has six articulated legs, enabling the drone to scuttle at a rate of eight metres per round and lock itself into a position of stability. Feet will bond to the metal of the facility, enabling the drone to become essentially a piece of furniture, a barricade in a door or an equipment holder on a wall.

GRAV MODULE

The grav module contains a gravitic generator, enabling the drone to fly at 12 metres per round. An otherwise unarmed drone could smash into someone, causing 2D damage, unless they dodge by making an Average (8+) DEX check. Stability within the installation is near-perfect, enabling someone to jump from one hovering drone to another or perform similar feats of acrobatics.

ARM MODULE

Up to six standard arm modules can be added, each ending in a gripper or an embedded item such as a scientific instrument or construction tool. An arm could be used as a club, doing 1D damage or 2D if a heavy object were gripped. The most deadly implement wielded by a drone arm is a light plasma cutter, which does 4D damage out to a range of five metres and 2D to ten metres. Beyond this the plasma dissipates very quickly.

DISINTEGRATOR MODULE

The accessory bay can be used to mount an industrial disintegrator. This is normally used to project a circular field above, below or on a level with the drone. For example, a vertical shaft can be dropped by projecting the field directly below the drone, or a horizontal one by projecting it ahead. The field forms 83.4 centimetres from the drone and could be used for combat in a rather basic manner. Essentially the disintegrator-armed drone moves towards its target until the field makes contact. People and personal armour are disintegrated at a rate of one point per round. Progress through rock is about 12 centimetres per minute and the material of the base cannot be affected unless the power has been shut down. A military version of this device was used by the Ancients to breach fortifications but the industrial one lacks the power to defeat the base's anti-disintegrator field.

DRONE CONFIGURATIONS

General Worker: Leg module, two or more arms, possibly with tools
Constructor: Grav module, disintegrator module, two or more arms
Transporter: Grav or leg module, carrying items in accessory bay
External Scout: Grav module, two or more arms

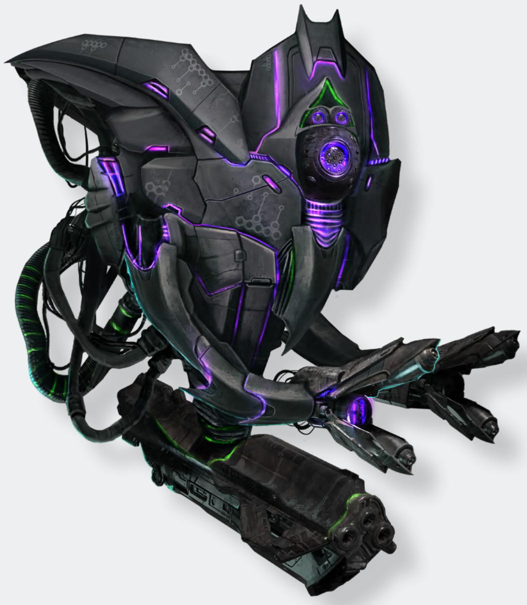
Drones can exert roughly twice the force a human could using their robotic arms and lift improbably sized objects. A load of 350 kilograms can be carried by a walking or flying drone providing it can get the object properly balanced. None of the drones are designed to fight.

Robot	Hits	Locomotion	Speed	TL	Cost
General Worker	50	Walker	9m	?	?
Skills	Athletics (dexterity) 4, Athletics (endurance) 3, Athletics (strength) 3, Melee 0, Profession (labourer) 2, Recon 1				
Attacks	Improvised (1D or 2D), Plasma Cutter (4D)				
Manipulators	6 x (STR 15 DEX 10)				
Endurance	Unlimited				
Traits	Armour (+12), ATV, Heightened Senses, IR/UV Vision, Large (+2)				
Programming	Basic (labourer) (INT 4)				
Options	Auditory Sensor (broad spectrum), Electronics Toolkit (advanced) x3, Mechanical Toolkit (advanced) x3, PRIS Sensor, Radiation Environment Protection (+1,000 rads), Recon Sensor (improved), Self-Maintenance Enhancement (advanced), Transceiver 500km (advanced), Vacuum Environment Protection, Voder Speaker, Weapon Mount (medium), Wireless Data Link				

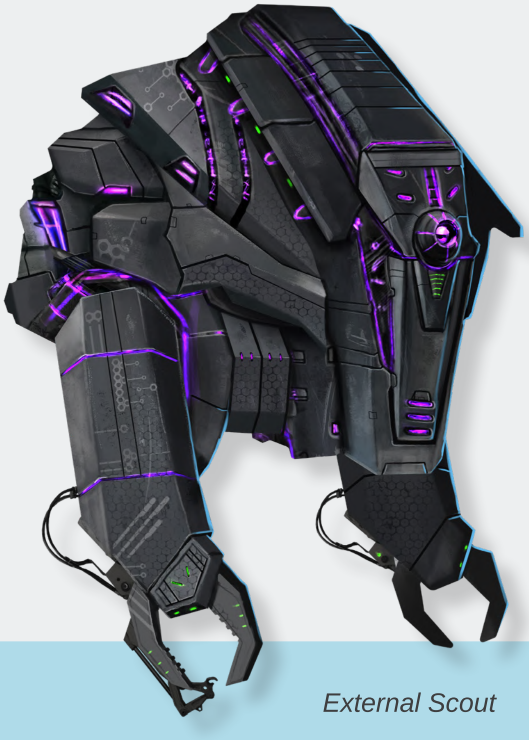
Robot	Hits	Locomotion	Speed	TL	Cost
Constructor	50	Grav	12m	?	?
Skills	Athletics (dexterity) 4, Athletics (endurance) 3, Athletics (strength) 3, Heavy Weapons 0, Melee 0, Profession (labourer) 2, Recon 1				
Attacks	Improvised (1D or 2D), Industrial Disintegrator (special), Plasma Cutter (4D)				
Manipulators	4 x (STR 15 DEX 10)				
Endurance	Unlimited				
Traits	Armour (+12), Flyer, Heightened Senses, IR/UV Vision, Large (+2),				
Programming	Basic (labourer) (INT 4)				
Options	Auditory Sensor (broad spectrum), Electronics Toolkit (advanced), Mechanical Toolkit (advanced), PRIS Sensor, Radiation Environment Protection (+1,000 rads), Recon Sensor (improved), Self-Maintenance Enhancement (advanced), Transceiver 500km (advanced), Vacuum Environment Protection, Voder Speaker, Weapon Mount (medium),Weapon Mount (medium), Wireless Data Link				

Robot	Hits	Locomotion	Speed	TL	Cost
Transporter	50	Walker or Grav	9m or 12m	?	?
Skills	Athletics (dexterity) 4, Athletics (endurance) 3, Profession (labourer) 2, Recon 1				
Attacks	Improvised (1D or 2D)				
Manipulators	None				
Endurance	Unlimited				
Traits	Armour (+12), ATV or Flyer, Heightened Senses, IR/UV Vision, Large (+2),				
Programming	Basic (labourer) (INT 4)				
Options	Auditory Sensor (broad spectrum), PRIS Sensor, Radiation Environment Protection (+1,000 rads), Recon Sensor (improved), Self-Maintenance Enhancement (advanced), Storage Compartment (hazardous material) x50, Transceiver 500 km (advanced), Vacuum Environment Protection, Voder Speaker, Wireless Data Link				

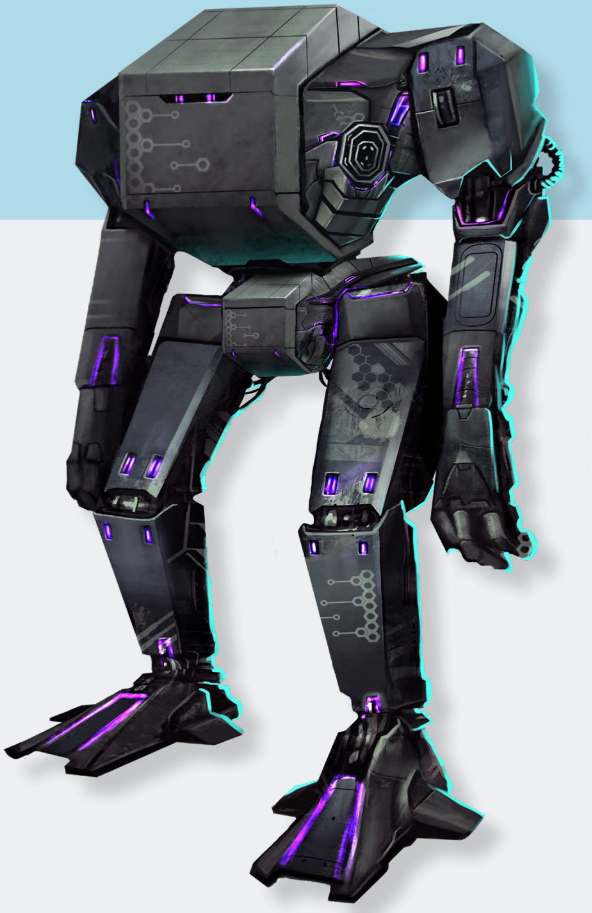
Robot	Hits	Locomotion	Speed	TL	Cost
External Scout	50	Grav	12m	?	?
Skills	Athletics (dexterity) 4, Athletics (endurance) 3, Athletics (strength) 3, Recon 3				
Attacks	Improvised (1D or 2D)				
Manipulators	4 x (STR 15 DEX 10)				
Endurance	Unlimited				
Traits	Armour (+12), Flyer, Heightened Senses, IR/UV Vision, Large (+2)				
Programming	Basic (recon) (INT 4)				
Options	Auditory Sensor (broad spectrum), Environment Processor, Olfactory Sensor (advanced), PRIS Sensor, Radiation Environment Protection (+1,000 rads), Recon Sensor (advanced), Self-Maintenance Enhancement (advanced), Transceiver 5,000km (advanced), Vacuum Environment Protection, Voder Speaker, Wireless Data Link				



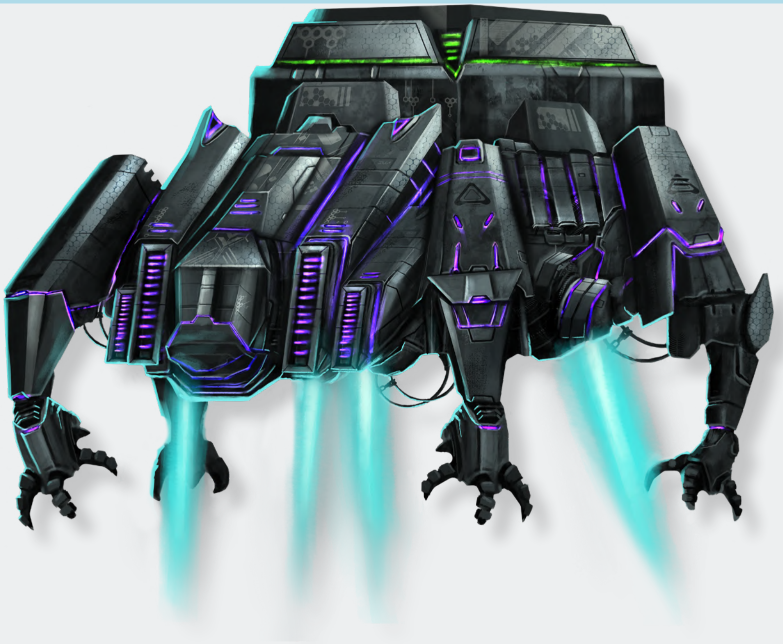
Constructor



External Scout



General Worker



Transporter

Drones are generally programmed to go about their tasks unobtrusively but with close supervision. Their programming deals more with the etiquette of getting out of the way of important personnel or passing one another without being a nuisance to people than actually carrying out tasks. They are physically adept and agile, and do what they do very well. However, despite their advanced nature, their level of initiative is little better than that of a human-made robot.

RITUAL CHAMBER (8)

This chamber is clearly used for ceremonial purposes. There are numerous statues, all facing the central dais in attitudes of awe and reverence. The walls are decorated in unusually intense patterns and can act as a psionic trigger. Yusote and his senior crew have seen them and are starting to understand what they mean. The Travellers are behind the curve on this but anyone who is or becomes sensitive to memory triggers will eventually gain an impression of their content.

The imagined-remembered scenes show a history of the installation, starting with a team tunnelling into the mountainside from what is now one of the landing points. The construction of the base continues, with scenes of harmonious work and mutual endeavour under the benevolent eye of the installation's leaders. All the staff are Droyne. The images from within do not give any hint of an inner base but it may be possible to figure out there are areas which have not yet been discovered.

Eventually the workers begin creating what is now known as G482. Some of the results are misshapen monsters but eventually a recognisable creature appears. Yusote and his people cannot view these images for the usual reason; the creatures are edited out of their consciousness. The perverted casteing ritual used to create the creatures becomes clear, although not the details of how to perform it. Finally, they witness the hurried evacuation of the installation, with left-behind drones continuing to serve their function until they finally shut down.

SLEEPING POD CHAMBER (9)

This small chamber contains six sleeping pods but no sanitary or eating facilitates. It was installed to facilitate the wakeup of test subjects from the cryo storage area and was never intended as a living space.

BULK CRYO STORAGE (10)

This chamber was obviously recently cut into the rock. Entry is by way of a short corridor that acts as an airlock. It has a floor of the usual outer-wall material but the roof and outer edges are still irregular rock. There are hundreds of cryo-stasis pods here, most of them occupied. The majority of occupants are Droyne but there are quite a few humans and examples of other species. The rock around the cavern is not entirely gas-tight, so little effort has been made to maintain air pressure here. A vacc suit is necessary to operate in this area but anyone without one is automatically issued a goop-suit in the usual manner before the airlock opens.

The lack of air is one reason why subjects would be difficult to wake. In addition, these are advanced extremely long-term stasis units whose functions are difficult to figure out. If the Travellers want to wake someone the best option is to move them to a sleeping pod, which will automatically provide medical care. The waking process takes 2Dx30 minutes in a pod, with success virtually certain. Attempting the process with improvised equipment is highly dangerous, requiring a Formidable (14+) Medic check to properly revive a patient. Any negative Effect imposes 1D damage on a random characteristic, permanently. If any characteristic drops below 1 the subject dies.

Anyone woken from these stasis units will be weak, groggy and confused for some time. They will be little use in the struggle for the base and will not initially remember much. Their stories are the same; they were going about normal business when… they woke up here. The subjects were taken for experimentation, which will become apparent sooner or later. Most are very ordinary individuals but it is possible someone might have suitable skills to become a Traveller. If this does not happen immediately, the Referee can always use it as a plot device to introduce a new or replacement Traveller who has begun the uplift process described on page 287.

SECRET CHAMBER (11)

The grav lift to the inner base once opened into a circular chamber at the end of a short corridor. When Yusote's ship was detected entering orbit, the current occupants of the base decided to conceal their presence. Two reactivated drones, one with a disintegrator/re-shaper unit and one equipped to extrude wall metal, were sent to hurriedly cover the entrance with what appears to be a normal wall. Close examination reveals that this wall is different from the usual, mainly because it is quite thin. This wall is treated as being an internal fitting rather than an external structural member and could be breached with enough effort. This will cause the two drones in the area to make an attack as best they can.

The secret chamber contains a grav-lift shaft similar to the others but angled to the side as well as upwards. It will take the Travellers to the inner base unless disabled. Even then, it is possible to ascend the shaft if some means of lift can be obtained. A drone with a grav unit or the transportation platforms from the landing areas might be used.

THE CAVERN CHAMBER (12)

This chamber is highly unusual, in that it does not have a metal shell for much of its length. Entry is by way of an airlock, although that may not be apparent when the Travellers use the outer door. Proceeding through this door leads into a short length of corridor, with another door behind it. This will not open until the outer one is closed. The cavern beyond is unpressurised and would be lethal to anyone without protection. However, anyone who would be harmed is protected by an automated system; as the pressure in the airlock corridor starts to drop, hidden dispensers spit a gobbet of sticky, transparent goop at each endangered Traveller. This expands almost instantly into what appears to be a soap-bubble covering their clothing with a larger bubble for the head. The structure of this goop-suit will degrade over time, starting after about 30 minutes. It will be compromised after 3D more minutes but during this time will permit Travellers to conduct fine work as if with bare hands. The suit's structure yields oxygen the whole of this time, allowing what is effectively a 'shirtsleeves' experience in even hard vacuum.

The Travellers may eventually find dispensers for these suits stored in the base, as part of emergency kits and working tools. The emergency version takes the form of a rod about 14 centimetres long. After six goop-suits have been dispensed the rod is useless and begins to crumble. The 'work' version is 24 centimetres long, greater in diameter and good for 30 goop-suits. A partially used dispenser would normally be discarded; there is no way to recharge them but new ones can be produced by the installation's systems if the Travellers can figure out how.

The outer door opens into a large natural cavern, a little over a kilometre in length and 400 metres at its widest point. The floor is uneven, with occasional sinkholes and hidden dips. There are artificially regular shafts here and there, clearly boreholes used to take samples. However, where a human team might drill a narrow shaft, these are over 1 metres in diameter and impossibly regular. They were made by using a circular disintegrator field projected by a spider-drone. The Travellers might be able to figure that out once they know about the drones.

The cavern was being studied by the base staff, like everything else. Its floor dips away from the installation entrance and the roof comes down to meet it. There are secondary chambers and fissures that could be explored but it is unlikely the Travellers will have time. There are no great treasures to be found here, no matter how long they search.

LANDING AREA ACCESS AND GUARD CHAMBERS (13)

This chamber has a gently bowled floor, with tunnels leading slightly down into its sides. These radiate out in six directions and run to a guard chamber similar to the one at the main entrance. This is an oval chamber with entrances on the long sides, allowing guards to take intruders in a crossfire from positions behind hard cover on the flanks. Another position of cover allows guards to shoot down the tunnel leading to the landing pad.

Beyond the guard room is a short section of straight tunnel whose floor can be set to disintegrate anyone on it and beyond that is a platform containing several one-person and six-person transport devices. Stepping onto one and gripping the handholds causes the device to speed off down the long, curving tunnel to the landing area. It is also possible to walk but this represents needless and boring effort. There are multiple transport devices at each end. They can be manually controlled by someone who spends some time figuring them out, and used to drive around the installation or even out over the planetary surface. A basic understanding of the controls allows the Traveller to use the Flyer (grav) skill with DM-2 on all control checks. Finer skills are developed over 2D+2 hours of operation, probably with multiple crashes, after which the negative DM ceases to apply.

Beyond the guard chamber the tunnel curves away and slightly down to the landing areas. These are identical, domed structures like any other. If the roof doors are shut, the landing bay is virtually invisible from outside. One of the bays holds Yusote's ship. The others are empty.

MACHINERY CHAMBERS (14)

These chambers contain complex and mysterious equipment, some of which seem to be connected with the operation of the base. There are few distinct systems; power, water and air-related equipment is intermixed in the same blocks and compartmentalised to deal with damage or breakdown. Around the walls of the chambers are workstations, which can be used to manually alter conditions in the base. Air pressure and gravity can be altered within safe limits by anyone with a basic knowledge of the system, although this can be over-ridden by the command chamber or from the inner base. Major alterations, such as reversing gravity in an area or drawing out all air and closing the doors, can only be accomplished by someone who has had considerable practice with the system and again can be over-ridden.

There are statues, mainly of Droyne but also humans, a Vargr and a bipedal creature of an unknown species, around the chamber. Most appear to be working with controls, which may give the Travellers a clue if they have not yet figured out how to operate the base's systems. Others are involved in fetch-and-carry type tasks or gazing admiringly into the middle distance. All are facing the command chamber on the upper level.

STORAGE AREAS (15)

Stockpiles of materials and equipment were routinely stored close to the laboratories and workshops. For the most part, ready items have been cleared out and all that remains are long-term stored components in metallic crates or open frame-shelving units. These items are potentially valuable to scientists or can be sold on the Ancients artefact market, providing they can be proven to be from an Ancients site.

MACHINERY LEVEL

The primary power and life support machinery of the installation is located away from the main living areas. It is not clear why this was done and the Travellers may end up simply saying 'because Ancients' as often happens with such mysteries. In fact the separation was for safety and security. The base can function using locally generated power in its inner and outer segments but requires a much higher level of output for the teleporters, disintegrator weapons and disintegrator shields. This power output comes with an equally elevated signature that might be detected by hostile forces. If so, the main machinery level would be targeted. Blasting through the base's disintegrator shields might be possible with enough weapons but there are other ways to destroy such an installation. Brute force, in the form of explosions or deadfall ordnance, might do it. The base's designers intended it to survive even a direct hit on the main power complex with antimatter bombs, achieved by collapsing the connecting shaft between the outer base and machinery level, putting thousands of tons of rock between the two; in the event of catastrophic attack on what an enemy thought was the main component of the base, the remainder might survive. An antimatter explosion could also be contained in this manner.

CHAMBER OF DESCENT (1)

The Chamber of Descent gives access to the outer base upper level.

MACHINERY LEVEL COMMAND CHAMBER (2)

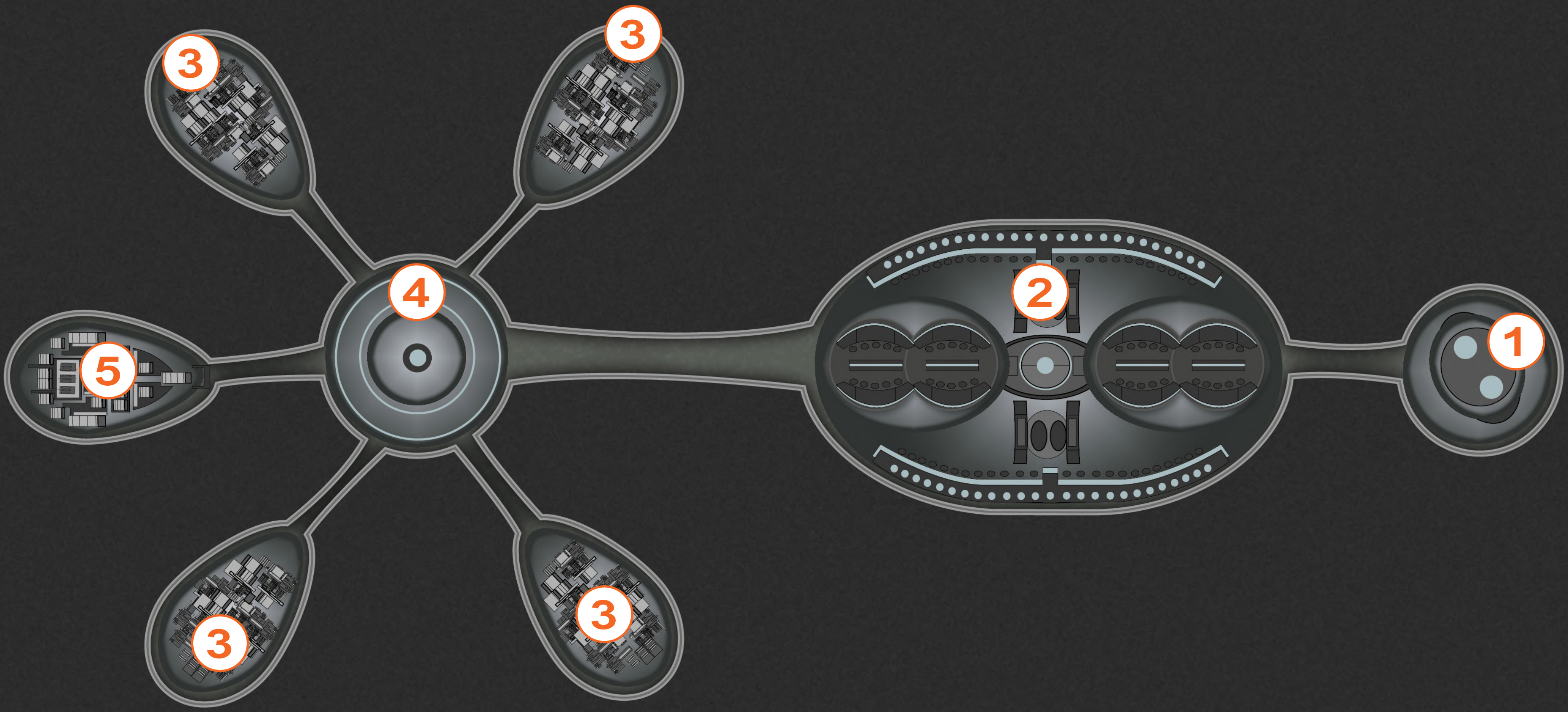
The machinery level has a command chamber similar to that in the outer base, although less ostentatious. It was rarely used and not needed unless a complex task needed overseeing. If the command dais is reactivated the Travellers can view a complete map of the installation including the inner base. This is omitted from the map in the outer base command centre as a result of instructions from the inner command centre but this chamber was overlooked. The usual awe-struck statues surround the dais.

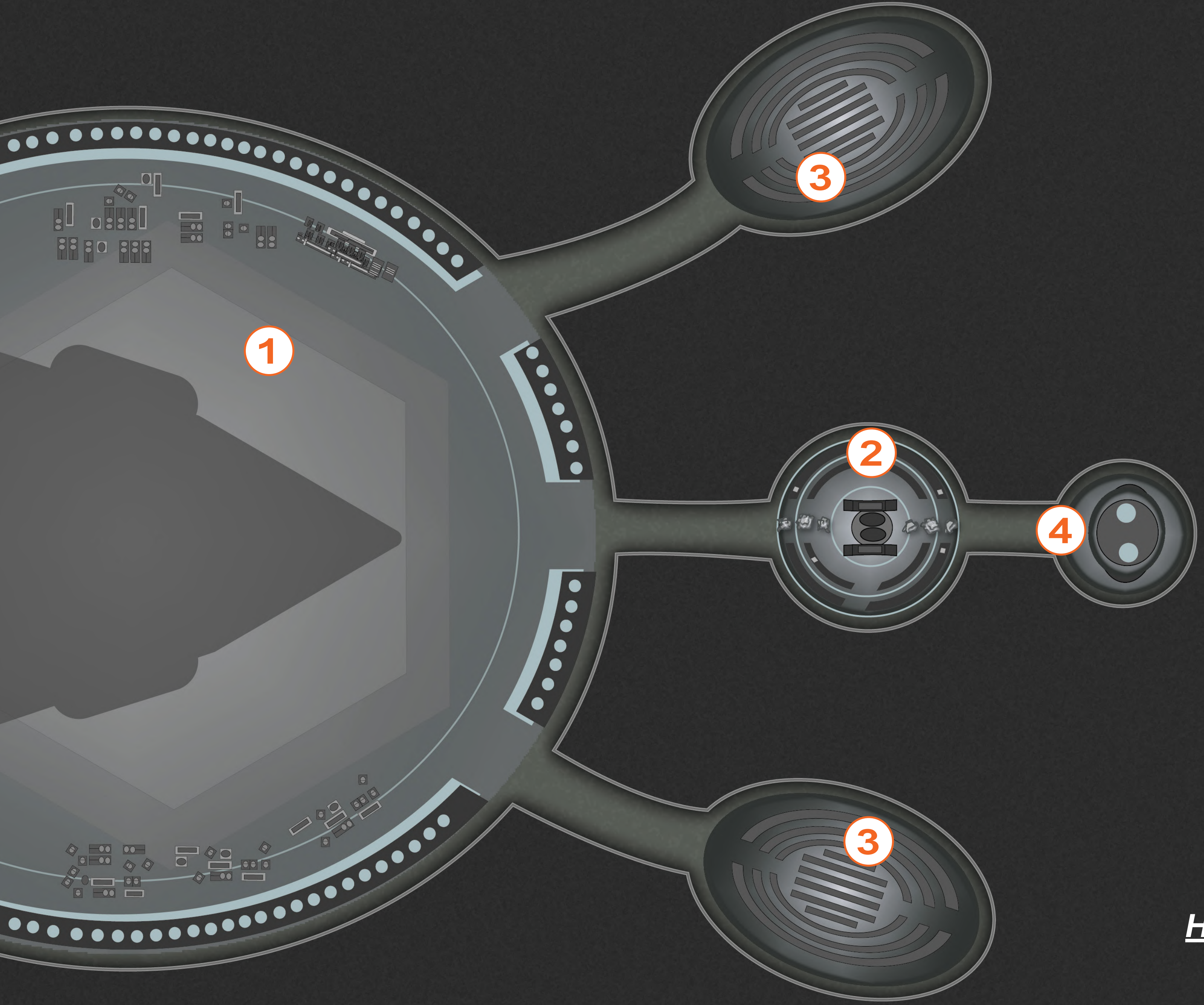
Close inspection of the command dais indicates there is something unusual about it; some additional function. In fact it is a teleporter which gives access to the inner base. This device was intended for use only in emergencies or when someone too important to transit through the outer base wanted to reach the machinery spaces. This teleporter will be used by the inner base crew to move drones and possibly personnel into the rest of the installation without using the lifts.

MACHINERY CHAMBERS (3)

Most of this area is taken up with complex, integrated machinery which is apparently geared to powering the base's heavy systems. There is some life support and technical equipment as a backup but power generation and storage are by far the most important function of this whole section. Much of the machinery is dedicated to using geothermal energy to create antimatter for storage.

MACHINERY LEVEL





HIGH ENTRY

THE ROD (4)

In the centre of the machinery spaces is a rod, similar to those seen on Calefaction but much thicker. It extends deep into the core of the planet and is used to draw geothermal energy up to the machinery chambers.

BATTERY CHAMBER (5)

The battery chamber contains racks of ovoid objects similar to the one Mercedes had. Some of the racks near the door are empty but there are still hundreds of ovoids here. Each is an antimatter battery which could be used for almost any purpose. Ancients equipment usually has concealed receptacles for such batteries but a convertor could be jury-rigged if there is enough time to study the device. Controlling the output is possible for those who have learned how – this is a 'fine control' feature without which the battery delivers far too much power for most devices; it is necessary to either study the batteries in detail and practice with their controls or else to rig a modulator from highly robust circuitry… unless of course the intent was to overload circuitry and electrify everything nearby.

HIGH ENTRY

The high entry area was reserved for VIP transports and essential items. No other vessels were permitted to land there although drones were sometimes despatched on errands, mostly sample collection or reconnaissance of an area. To facilitate a landing or drone recovery, the camouflaged shields covering the entry point are retracted. At this time the silvery metallic floor and walls are exposed and might be spotted from above or even below if someone is looking in the right direction. This is highly unlikely, as all vessels in the vicinity are tracked and the shields are not opened when there is any risk of discovery. It is likely the only people ever to have seen the high entry point open are Mercedes and her crew.

LANDING AREA (1)

The landing area can accommodate a craft up to 500 tons in displacement. It is currently occupied by the personal transport of Tellsadiu, an agent of the Ancient Tsyamoykyo. The outer doors will not open to admit another craft whilst it is present – the base automatically identifies it as a high-value craft to be protected.

RECEPTION CHAMBER (2)

This chamber exists for the sole purpose of receiving honoured guests or overlords to the facility. It is richly decorated, with psionic triggers informing the visitor of the importance of the base and its constructor. The statues are in two groups, some facing the new arrival in awed greeting and others facing the interior of the inner base. Their posture is for the most part one of supplication and veneration.

STORAGE CHAMBERS (3)

The storage areas contain only a few robotic drones and their accessories. These might be pressed into service to defend the installation in desperate need but for the most part either run errands in the entry and inner base areas or fly out on missions over the planetary surface.

INNER BASE ACCESS (4)

Access to the inner base is by way of the usual angled grav lift shaft. There are no defences on this approach; the builders assumed that trouble would come from below since only very important individuals would ever be given access to the high entry point.

INNER BASE

The inner base is the command centre for the whole installation, designed to remain self-contained and to survive even if the outer base is obliterated. In addition to double-strength outer walls, the inner base has additional protection as shown on the Base Defences table.

ENTRY CHAMBER (1)

Another entry chamber, where new arrivals can be properly greeted a second time, gives access to the grav lift headed upward to the high entry point.

COMMON RITUAL CHAMBER (2)

This large chamber serves as a transit hub for personnel moving between parts of the installation, allowing them to observe the perfunctory rituals of the working day whilst going about their business. An official would normally be stationed here to ensure correct observances were made and to handle minor problems in the manner of the officer of the watch on a naval ship.

AUDIENCE CHAMBER (3)

The base commander would hold court here when necessary, hearing supplications and receiving reports. Actual control of the base is carried out from the next chamber in but only essential personnel would ever be permitted to go in there. Armed guards on the flanks of this chamber would see to the security of the commander. In the event the commander was unavailable, a messenger with special privileges would wait here to bring word of anything important.

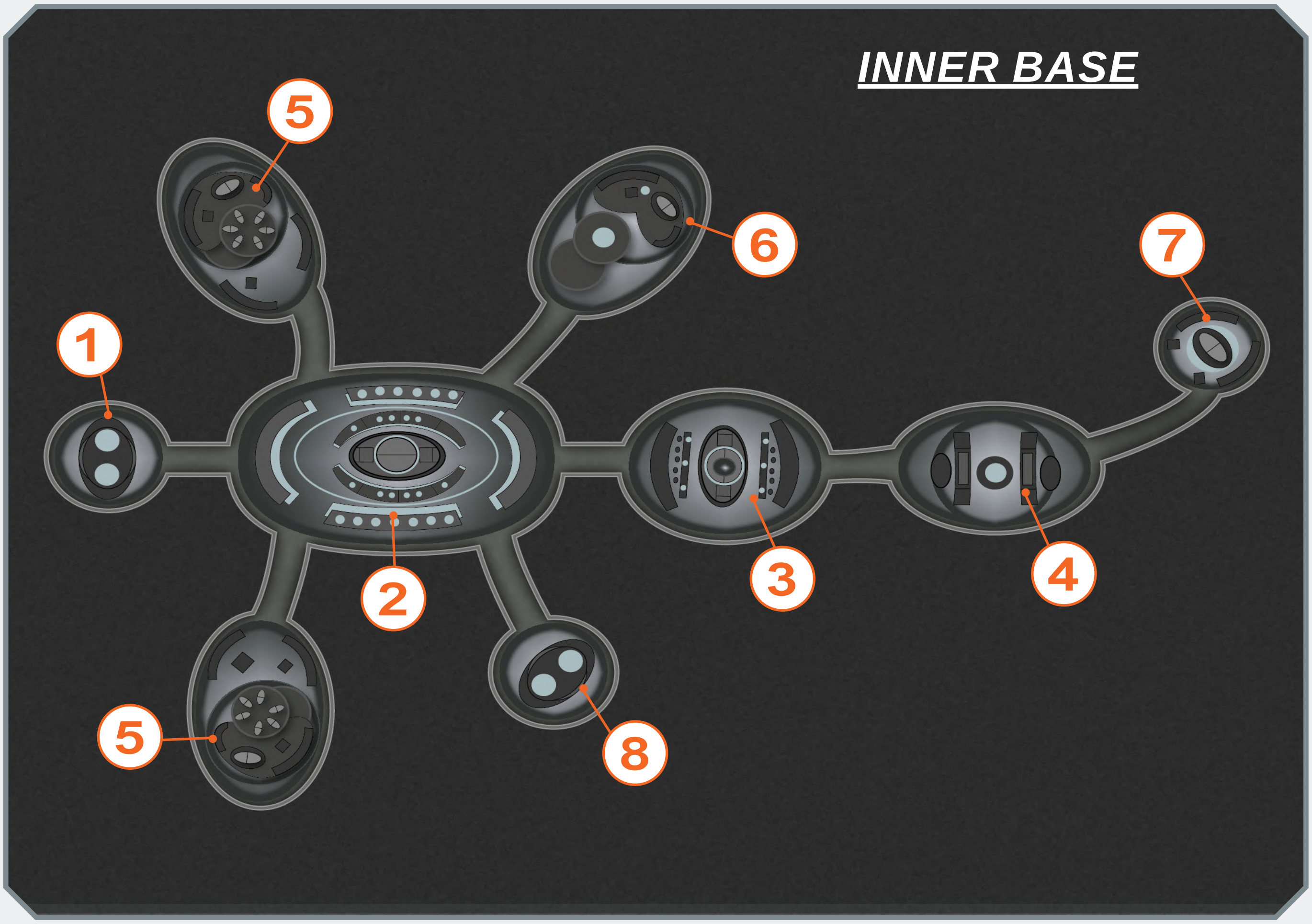
These practices have been re-implemented by Tellsadiu. Such interactions are inefficient but they suit the character of the Ancients – or at least some of them. What is the point of being overlords of the cosmos if there are no witnesses to your power? When time-critical operations are ongoing communication is switched to a combination of electronic data transfer and telepathy but the preference for ritual and the giving of veneration might delay the timely implementation of this practice in a crisis.

COMMAND CHAMBER (4)

The command chamber for the installation is grander than the others, as might be expected. It has a wide dais, enabling the illustrious base commander to allow favoured guests to stand in the command position, or be dismissed from the lofty position and replaced by an actual Ancient in the event the installation is favoured with a visit.

This command position controls the base's defence systems, targeted by means of a zoomable map/globe projected in the air beside the command position. Subordinate workstations can keep track of internal matters or view feeds from elsewhere on the planet, transferring images to the main command station as needed.

The weapons in this installation are unlikely to come into play against the Travellers. They are more a matter of plot; a problem to be solved if the Travellers are to triumph or even survive. The Travellers will see the effects these weapons again in *Wrath of the Ancients* and will discover that some Ancients had much more potent weaponry.



SUBORDINATE RESTING CHAMBERS (5)

Subordinates and minor guests were accommodated in these chambers. They are now partially in use by Tellsadiu's personnel.

VIP RESTING CHAMBER (6)

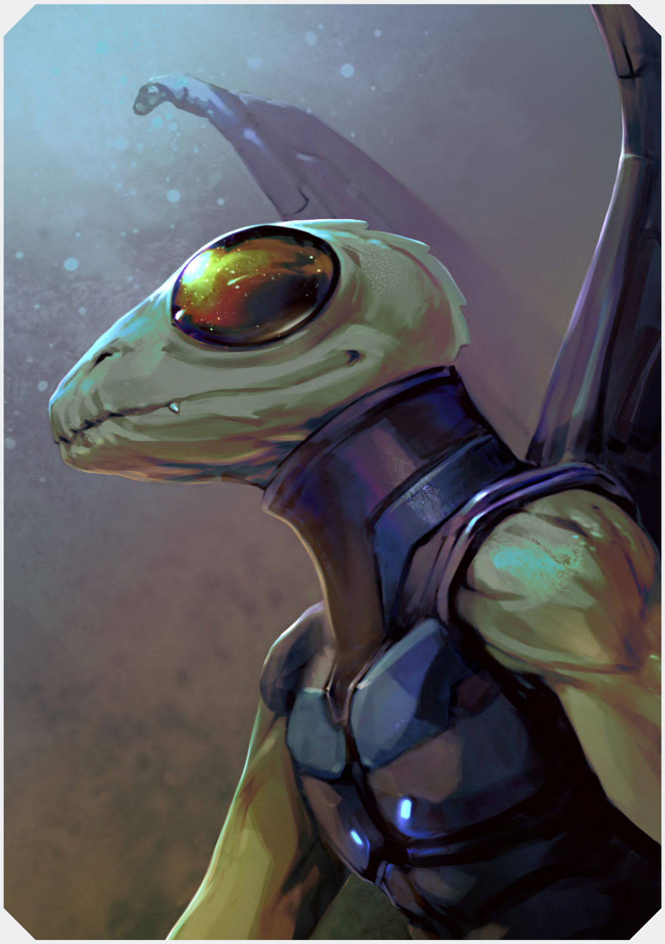
Important guests would use this chamber. It is notable that for all the massive ego possessed by Tellsadiu, he has taken these quarters for his own and left the base commander's chamber for his master. He is, after all, merely the first among ants to the greatness that is an Ancient.

COMMANDER'S RESTING CHAMBER (7)

The commander's resting chamber has been made ready for the arrival of Tellsadiu's master and is routinely guarded by one of his personnel despite the day of arrival having been postponed indefinitely.

CHAMBER OF DESCENT (8)

This chamber gives access to the grav lift leading to the secret area of the outer base.



Base Defences

System	Effects
Disintegrator Shield, Primary	The main disintegrator shield will completely block disintegration weapons originating from outside the mountain. Its effect covers a globe centring on the projector in the inner base.
Disintegrator Shield, Localised, Inner Base	The secondary disintegrator shield will protect only the inner base and high access area.
High-Energy Shield, Primary	The high-energy shield will squelch any known nuclear device in the manner of a nuclear damper and will do the same for antimatter devices. It covers the whole mountain.
High-Energy Shield, Localised	The localised high-energy shield protects the inner base and high access area even when the launch doors are open.
Disintegrator Weapon, Primary	The primary disintegrator weapon is designed to break large starships. It cannot hit a target that is rapidly evading or one under 5,000 tons, except by accident. Damage is 3DDx100 at spacecraft scale, for an average of 11,500 damage. A direct hit will typically vaporise a light cruiser.
Disintegrator Weapon, Secondary	The secondary disintegrator is designed for small ship defence. It delivers 3Dx10 damage at spacecraft scale.
Repulsor Device	The repulsor device is designed to fling threatening objects away from the installation. It can be used quite subtly or deliver acceleration that will tear most ships apart. The effects are somewhat random, resulting in 1Dx1Dx1D damage at spacecraft scale, as well as a violent relocation which might result in a crash. This is sufficient to reliably nullify a salvo of missiles.

TELLSADIU, SERVANT OF THE ANCIENTS

Tellsadiu is a human, at least superficially. His distant ancestors were taken from Earth by the Ancients and used as servitors across Charted Space. Most of those were wiped out in the Final War that destroyed Ancients' society or reverted to barbarism but Tellsadiu was one of the infinitely fortunate ones. His forebears faithfully served their master whilst he was cruelly enslaved by his brethren and played an infinitesimally small part in Tellsadiu's escape. They were rewarded by being taken with him to a new home and later sent out into the cosmos on missions of greater importance than they deserved.

The servitors of an Ancient belong to a very different culture than the 'free' humans of the Imperium. Where Tellsadiu and his kin serve a great purpose and a noble master, those other humans are unaware even of their insignificance. They enslave themselves to leaders no greater than themselves, or to a currency that ultimately represents nothing. Countless lives have been spent achieving nothing, when these lost humans could be uplifted to join the insignificant servitors of the Ancients.

Tellsadiu really does think like this. He knows he is nothing next to the magnificence of his master but holds himself above lesser servitors and infinitely so above 'free' humans. Their existence seems pointless to him, to the point where their lives are meaningless. Indeed, killing them might be a mercy since at least it ends their misery. Tellsadiu is the servant of a god; one that speaks to him and elevates him above others. He has participated in the construction of wonders and now is preparing the way for his master's return to Charted Space. Dying in this endeavour would be martyrdom and so long as his master knew he was faithful to the end, Tellsadiu would be content. The other members of the party, mostly humans, are equally zealous. They cannot be reasoned with or bribed and are not afraid of sacrifice. Their behaviour should be frightening to the Travellers – if the Ancients return it is the fate of everyone in Charted Space to become like them, or die at their hands.

The group led by Tellsadiu explored the outer base when they first arrived but quickly withdrew from it once others entered the installation. So long as Yusote – and now the Travellers – did not suspect the existence of an inner installation Tellsadiu was quite happy to let them wander around the outer base if they did not cause any damage. Indeed, he is pondering the merits of using the interlopers as test subjects rather than eliminating them when they become a nuisance. Until then, Tellsadiu shares the sublime indifference of his master towards ordinary humans and Droyne rushing around in their petty little lives.

Tellsadiu's group nominally consists of himself, two attendants who serve as messengers and subordinate commanders and several human and Droyne workers, guards and functionaries. The exact number can be adjusted by the Referee to suit the capabilities of the Travellers but there will be at least two technicians and two warriors. All dress in shimmering robes that change colour and reflectivity in a constant but unpredictable cycle. Their clothing contains circuitry that provides all the effects of the three personal shields described on page 252 and in addition a mundane Protection +1. A collar-and-headdress is worn by all but warriors, which gives instant interface with any system in the facility. Technicians can direct the drones or use them as remote observation points if the internal monitoring system is somehow disabled. The warriors instead wear a stylised helmet which provides the same function and also acts as a psionic shield, increasing the power of their own mental shield by +4.

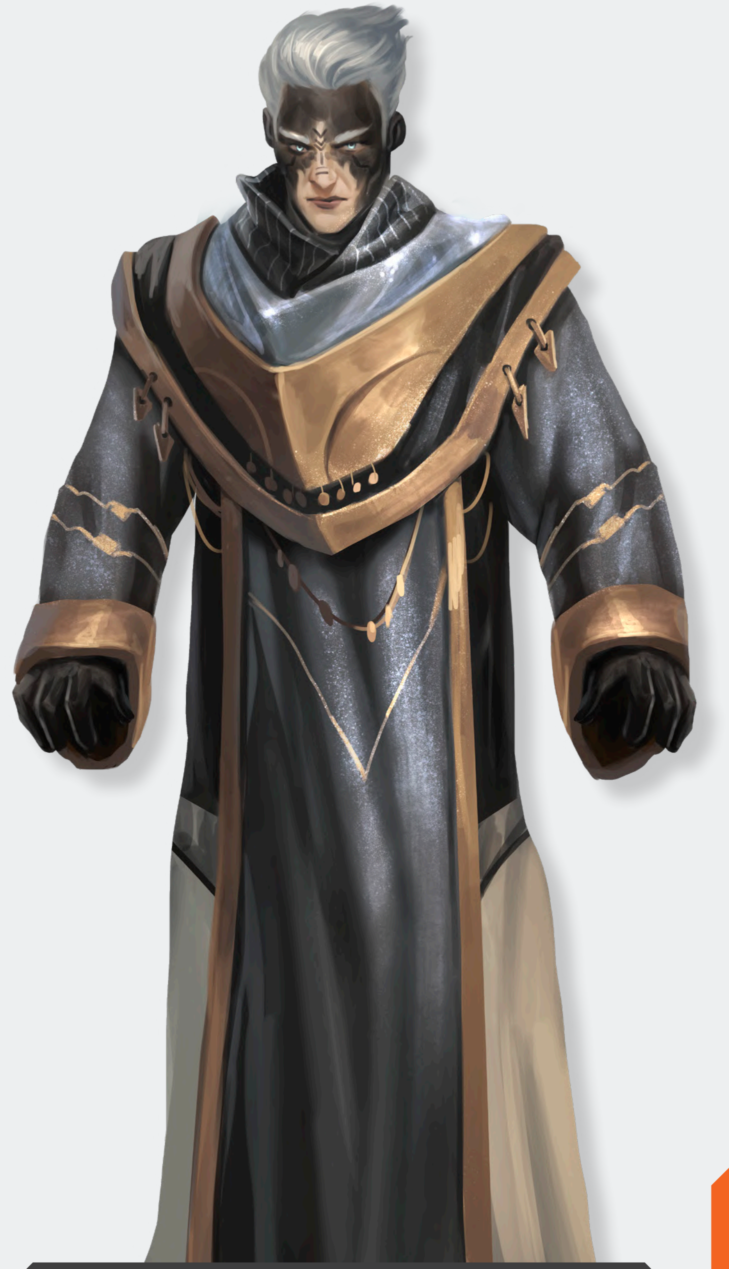
SOC is an irrelevant concept in Tellsadiu's home society. Everyone has a place and knows it. Thus SOC is replaced with PSI for these characters, indicating their psionic strength. Everyone has been trained to project a mental shield and operate psionically activated devices, but only Tellsadiu and his two attendants have useable powers of their own. Humans have been 'upgraded' with increased intellect and mental capacity, which has no obvious external signs, whilst the Droyne are bigger and stronger than typical Warriors.

TELLSADIU, SERVANT OF AN ANCIENT

Tellsadiu moves with unhurried grace and makes expansive gestures to show that everything he says and does is incredibly important. He speaks a little slowly when he deigns to speak at all, making everyone wait for information or censure. He does not praise anyone for anything, except his master. All he wants in the cosmos is to please his lord, which means keeping control of the installation no matter what. For this reason, he ordered his ship to fly away and destroy itself when he arrived; he is here to get the installation up and running, and to greet his master when the day finally comes. He will try to get the Travellers and Yusote's crew to serve him but he is not a diplomat. He simply tells them how wonderful everything is going to be and then starts giving orders. The idea someone would not want to obey with every fibre of their being is inconceivable to him, and at first he might not even realise the Travellers are ignoring his instructions. Once he does, they will be ignored if they seem harmless and squashed if they pose a threat or become inconvenient.

TELLSADIU'S DISINTEGRATOR

Servitors of an Ancient do not fight. Lowly warriors fight. Attendants and workers throw themselves in front of threats with a glad heart. Tellsadiu's disintegrator is not very powerful because it is meant to be used slowly. It affects anything he wants it to, that he can see through his own eyes or those of a subordinate using a telepathic link. Tellsadiu might use the device to confuse the Travellers, say by disintegrating something they are carrying. As a weapon the device is very potent but Tellsadiu will simply not think of using it that way. He might disintegrate someone who is attacking him as a punishment for their temerity but to him that is not fighting.



TELLSADIU, SERVANT OF AN ANCIENT

SPECIES	GENDER	AGE
—	Male	—

TRAITS			—	SKILLS
STR	9	**INT**	15	Awareness 6, Tactics (what would my master want me to do?) 6, Telepathy 6. No other skills required.
DEX	9	**EDU**	15	
END	9	**PSI**	15	

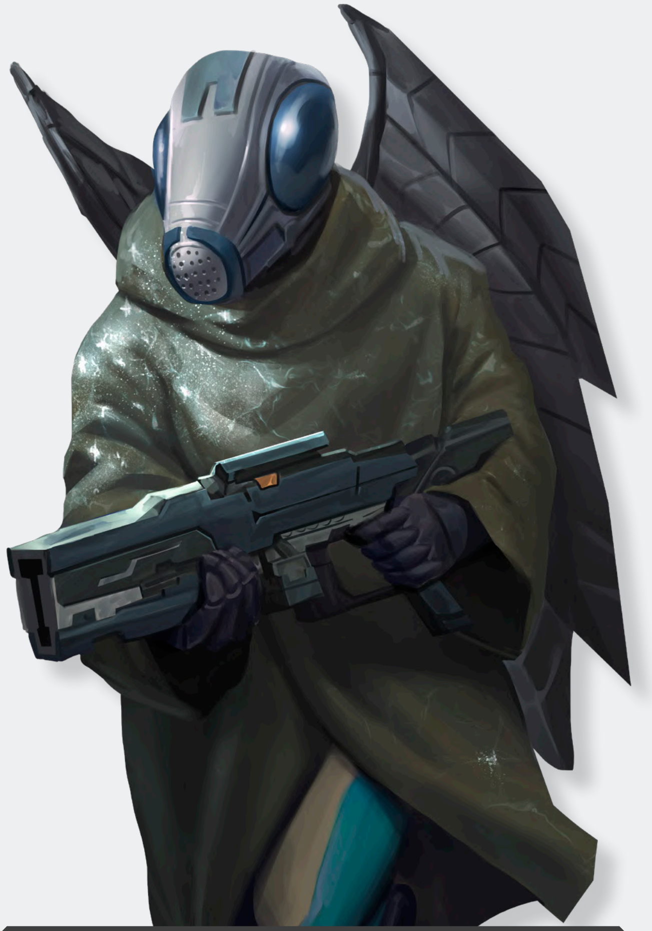
WEAPONS:	Mentally-targeted disintegrator for occasions when an example must be made (4D)
ARMOUR:	Shimmering Robe with Built-in Shields

ATTENDANT/MESSENGERS

SPECIES		GENDER		AGE
—		—		—
TRAITS		—	SKILLS	
STR	9	INT	13	Awareness 4, Profession (servitor) 4, Telepathy 4, Teleportation 4. No other skills are required.
DEX	9	EDU	13	
END	9	PSI	13	
ARMOUR:		Shimmering Robe with Built-in Shields		

ATTENDANT/MESSENGERS

The two messengers are humans with augmented mental powers. They do not fight but might direct drones to fight for them. If necessary they will throw themselves in front of Tellsadiu or carry a remotely detonated antimatter bomb into a crowded room. They will simply die if Tellsadiu does. This conditioning might be overcome but the attendants have no desire to try. Serving is their entire life and free will is an irrelevance.



TECHNICIANS

SPECIES		GENDER		AGE
—		—		—
TRAITS		—	SKILLS	
STR	9	INT	11	Awareness 2, Profession (worker) 4, Telepathy 2. No other skills are required.
DEX	9	EDU	11	
END	9	PSI	10	
ARMOUR:		Shimmering Robe with Built-in Shields		

TECHNICIANS

Tellsadiu has at least two worker/technicians intended for mental and technical tasks. They have no self-will or survival instinct, other than to prolong their usefulness. At need they might beat ineffectually on an enemy with their hands, or pick up an object and swing it wildly. They have no idea how to fight but will make a desperate attempt to protect their leader if he is threatened. This is more likely to be embarrassing for the target than hazardous.

WARRIORS

SPECIES		GENDER		AGE
Droyne		—		—
TRAITS		—	SKILLS	
STR	9	INT	11	Gun Combat (energy) 2
DEX	9	EDU	11	
END	9	PSI	10	
WEAPONS:		Fusion Rifle (4D or 16D)		
ARMOUR:		Shimmering Robe with Built-in Shields		

WARRIORS

Tellsadiu has at least two warriors in his service. They are modified Droyne and are as single-minded as the other servitors. Since disintegrator shields are commonplace in their home society the warriors are armed with a fusion weapon which has two settings. On low power it does 4D damage and will not do much harm to the interior of the installation. On full power damage is 16D, which can be quite harmful to the surroundings.

THE TRAVELLERS AT TWILIGHT'S PEAK

The finale of this campaign takes place at Twilight's Peak. This should begin as an exploration of the base, expanding into a complex diplomatic situation compounded by a deepening mystery, and finally exploding into a battle for survival. At first the Travellers will think they are alone in the base and may be surprised to encounter Yusote. Tellsadiu will not reveal his presence until he thinks the time is right but may be discovered before he is ready.

YUSOTE'S AGENDA

Yusote wants the installation for his Oytrip. It is unacceptable for anyone to know about Twilights Peak. Therefore, if the Travellers will not join him and demonstrate their loyalty, he will have to kill them. Yusote is in no hurry to do this, however. Ideally the Travellers can be used as cannon-fodder to test dangerous equipment or explore hazardous areas. Yusote will eventually turn hostile but this process will be accelerated by the Travellers if they harm Yusote's crew – or if he thinks they have. He prefers the slow, subtle approach; let the Travellers take all the risks and eliminate them when they are no longer useful.

Once Yusote knows about Tellsadiu, he immediately begins working towards his destruction. Yusote sees Tellsadiu as a dangerous rival and will make common cause with the Travellers to eliminate him. Indeed, Yusote considers stopping Tellsadiu to be so overwhelmingly important that he would sacrifice his crew and himself to keep the installation out of the hands of an Ancient. He does not know that his Oytrip have already encountered the Ancient and been defeated, nor that they have sent a ship to Twilight's Peak on a mission of destruction.

TELLSADIU'S AGENDA

Tellsadiu wants to control the base and have it ready for his master's arrival. There can be no compromise there. He would like to experiment with the G482 creatures using the interlopers as test subjects and will pursue this until it becomes apparent he needs to concentrate on controlling the base.

THE OTHER DROYNE SHIP

Fleeing the defeat of their fleet, one warship from Yusote's Oytrip made its way to Imperial space and has located Twilight's Peak. This was accomplished using sensors not available to any known Oytrip or human community. They were improvised from an artefact held by the Oytrip and the warship had another. This is a planet-buster device using a fragmenting teleportal. The Oytrip only had one and expending it was a difficult choice. However, the Ancient must be prevented from taking control of the base – and if he is already present he must be killed. The vessel will simply arrive and deliver the device without communicating, then stagger back into jumpspace. The Travellers will learn more about this ship in *Wrath of the Ancients*.

The planet-buster weapon offers a way around all the shielding and devices surrounding the installation, by the direct application of brute force. A disintegrator-shielded pod is dropped from orbit, falling almost to the planetary surface and building up a large amount of kinetic energy with the aid of gravity. When close, the outer teleporter ring detaches and the rest of the device falls through it, teleporting the weapon back to the top of the gravity well. After several repetitions the projectile is allowed to crash into the planetary surface, causing a massive release of energy and the total destruction of everything around. The impact will be sufficient to turn Twilight's Peak into a crater.

ARRIVING IN THE BASE

The Travellers will initially be able to explore the upper level of the outer base without interference. Yusote will pull his crew back, out of the way, and observe. The Referee should let the Travellers experience the wonders of an Ancients installation, taking time over the initial exploration and establishing how the décor looks and the base feels. The Travellers can experiment with machinery and feeding-stations, perhaps even taking a nap in a sleeping pod. Injuries will be attended to whilst the Traveller sleeps, which might be a shock upon waking but no harm will come to anyone during this phase.

LATE ARRIVALS

If the Travellers have arrived late, they may find Yusote already in conflict with Tellsadiu. If so, Yusote will want to make contact more quickly but will still observe for a while. He presents a bleak picture of the situation and offers the Travellers an alliance. He will honour it, sort of, providing some instruction on what the base does in return for working against Tellsadiu. However, he will use the Travellers to take risks instead of his own people.

If the Travellers are very late, a force from Omicron Division will have arrived and entered the base by triggering one of the landing pads. Where they got the device to do this is a secret that will die with them. Omicron Division will be in open conflict with Yusote, after an incident triggered by Tellsadiu. Both sides are highly suspicious of the Travellers but will try to recruit them. Any exploration of the base will have to take the form of an armed reconnaissance or be conducted with great stealth.

The Referee can modify the flow of events within the installation to reflect a late arrival of the Travellers. Incidents will still occur in the order they are presented here, unless the Travellers' actions cause a change.

A STRANGE FEELING

During exploration of the base, the Travellers experience a moment of disorientation. This happens to different Travellers at different times. It is quite distressing; loss of balance, blurred vision, hearing loss and a sharp headache all combine to give the Traveller a thoroughly unpleasant few minutes. There is no apparent cause and the Travellers might think they are under attack or have triggered a base defence system. That is not the case; they are experiencing the beginning of a process that will ultimately benefit them greatly.

One-by-one, the Travellers are subject to a psionic trigger in the wall decoration, the shape of the rooms and the statues. This is not dissimilar to a Droyne casteing ritual and initially causes changes in their brain chemistry and neural links. Physical changes will follow in some cases. A Traveller whose mind is changing will need a little more food than usual and crave certain nutrients leading them to eat things they would not normally touch. Those whose bodies are changing will have a voracious appetite, craving bulk protein above all else. For now, all they will notice is a change in eating patterns or the foods they desire.

This is the beginning of the uplift process described on page 287. The Travellers will be impaired for the next day or so, which might be terribly inconvenient, but ultimately they are on their way to becoming something far more than human… or whatever species they are. There is one other immediate effect, although the Travellers may be entirely unaware of it. Anyone who has been affected by the gems found by Sorrel is no longer afflicted. They may not immediately notice the absence of weird dreams and the strange compulsion to handle and meditate upon the gem, but it is gone. Indeed, the Travellers' perceptions have subtly shifted. They are no longer as confused by Ancients technology as they were. This translates to a permanent DM+1 to try to figure out Ancients technology or devices.

EXPERIENCING WONDERS

There are many of what might be termed 'mundane wonders' in the installation. If the Travellers miss them, Yusote's crew might demonstrate. Certainly they will show friendly Travellers the sleeping pods and feeding stations, and also how to dispense clothing for themselves. This is all fairly harmless and Travellers who ask about controls or how the base works will initially be ignored.

The Travellers will probably be able to access a control area, although Yusote does not want them hanging around in his command chamber. Whether they are shown by a Droyne or experienced for themselves, the Referee should ensure the Travellers witness the world displays. They may be able to interact with them to some extent, although there is nothing destructive that can be done from the outer base. It is, however, possible to zoom in on starships approaching the planet, if there are any.

The Travellers will also be able to explore the information feeds from drones elsewhere in the system. They might even reactivate one, although it will be somewhere interesting but irrelevant to the storyline. For example, the Travellers might reactivate a probe that has lain in a crater on a distant moon for millennia, sending it feebly crawling across the surface once more until its power finally runs out. The chances of finding anything important are rather slim but the experience of controlling an Ancients probe might be exciting to the Travellers. They can also learn about the capabilities of the probes this way, which may be useful.

MEETING YUSOTE

The Travellers may have a feeling they are being watched (they are!) or think they spotted movement out of the corner of an eye. The Referee should play on this for a while, with ‘haunted house’ moments where a glimpsed figure turns out to be just changing light patterns behind a statue. Eventually, however, the Travellers will encounter Yusote’s crew. If this is a planned meeting, he will send Diusk to make contact and if not Diusk will hurry to wherever the initial contact is taking place and present his master’s compliments.

Unless the contact is violent the Travellers will be invited to an audience with Yusote in the command chamber. Even if there has been conflict, Diusk will try to make peace. A lost Warrior or Worker is of no great consequence if the Travellers can be co-opted. If a peaceful – if perhaps fraught – meeting can be arranged the Travellers will be ushered into the presence of Yusote, atop the command dais in full regalia, with his Drones and Warriors in attendance, Workers and Technicians at their tasks around the chamber.

Diusk does most of the talking on behalf of his master. He runs although long and elaborate greetings, making sure to praise both the Traveller he is addressing and Yusote several times. He may make mention of previous meetings, establishing a history of cooperation and mutual assistance. Eventually he gets down to business. The great Leader Yusote, in his magnificent wisdom, has brought his vessel to this place and now commands the installation. The Travellers are his honoured guests and most welcome but are warned that some parts of the installation are dangerous.

If the Travellers wish it, Diusk can explain the basics of living in the facility and will even demonstrate how the controls for various systems work. This short-cuts the learning process for the Travellers, although Diusk will not demonstrate sensitive systems. He will take the Travellers on a tour – accompanied by a couple of Warriors – of the upper level of the outer base and if the Travellers persist in asking he will extend this to the lower level and the machinery chambers. If the Travellers go into the cavern chamber, Diusk will not think to warn them about what is about to happen. He will be goop-suited at the same time the Travellers are and is not in the least surprised at the occurrence. The Travellers should be given a chance to interact with Yusote’s crew before major events transpire.

INTERLUDE... SOMEWHERE ELSE

The Travellers might activate the teleporter in the Second Chamber of Distant Access by themselves but if they do not Yusote will have someone show them how to do it. Diusk passes on a request that they use the teleporter and explore the place beyond. It was unpleasant for Droyne, with conditions that made it hard to function there. Humans and other non-Droyne will do a lot better. Yusote proposes that if the Travellers will perform a reconnaissance and bring back samples, he will reward them with powerful devices his crew have discovered.

The devices are unimpressive to look at; just a fist-sized egg-shaped silvery object that morphs slightly to attach itself to a lapel, belt or similar location. Yusote has Diusk explain that these are emergency escape devices. They have been calibrated to bring the user back to the Second Chamber of Distant Access, such that even if the Travellers cannot return to the teleporter they can still make their escape. Once the Travellers have completed their task Yusote’s staff will unlock the full function of the devices. They can be set to take the user and whatever they are wearing or holding in their hands to a pre-set location. Diusk warns that resetting the location risks confusing the device to the point where it becomes dangerous to use or entirely inoperative. Likewise, activating the teleporter risks burning the device out. However, the Travellers will have a way out of any situation at least once.

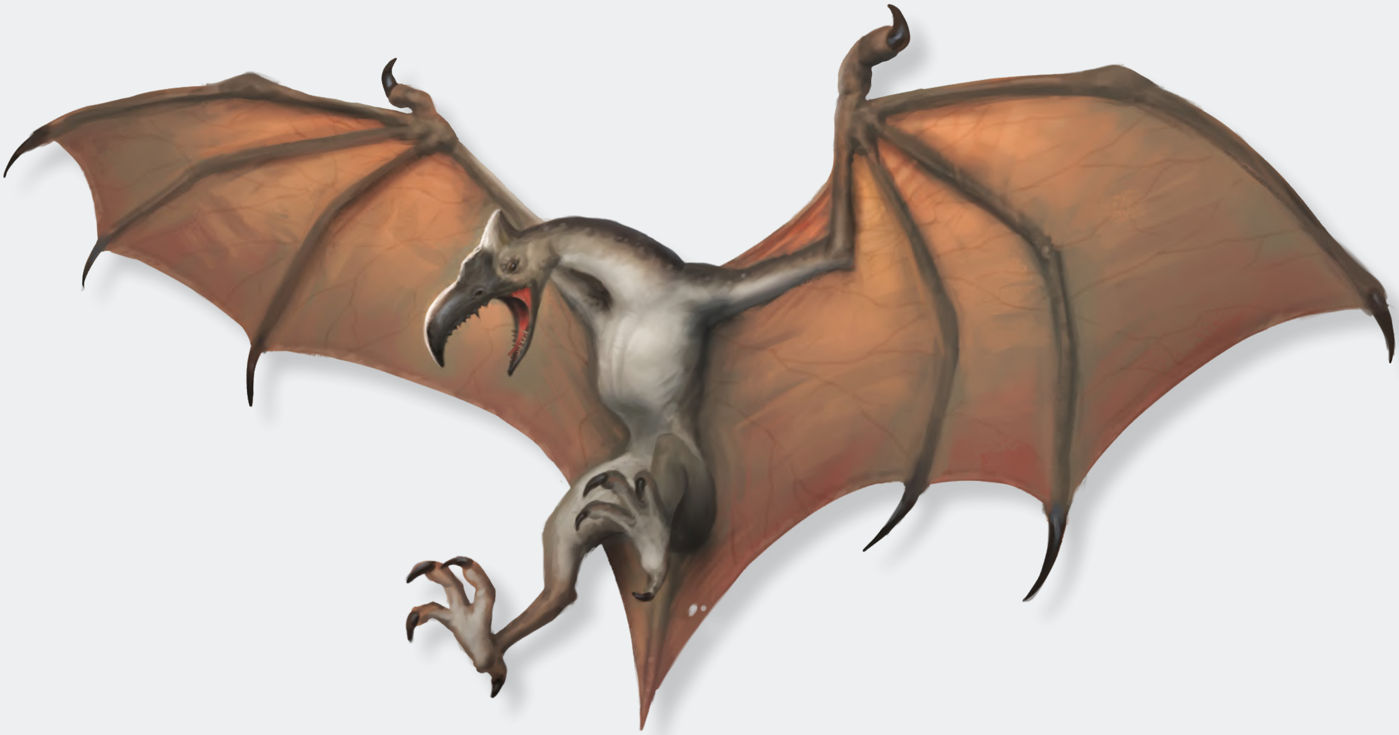
If the Travellers accept, they will be shown to the Second Chamber of Distant Access and equipped for their mission. Droyne Workers and Technicians solemnly hand them their equipment and weapons whilst a Drone makes gestures and says words that presumably are somehow important. Finally the Travellers are ready to enter the teleporter, which unceremoniously makes them be elsewhere.

The teleporter produces a strange sensation of dislocation and then the Travellers are standing on a silvery platform under an alien sky. Twisted branches partially block out the lead-coloured clouds, which are lit by distant lightning. The air is dense and heavy and… wet. Very wet. Unaided breathing is uncomfortable but within tolerable limits. The Travellers can see large creatures, not unlike grazing dinosaurs, pushing their way through the trees not far away. As yet they are taking no notice of the Travellers.

The moments after arrival are a bit like being slapped with a wet and unpleasant-smelling towel. Travellers might panic, fearing an inability to breathe. This will not happen to anyone who arrived with a sealed helmet or a mask that supplies air – filter masks will not help; the Traveller needs bottled air. Staying calm and adjusting quickly requires an Average (8+) END check. Those that fail will be able to compose themselves in a minute or two but may be distressed for this time. Assistance from fellow Travellers would help if they can figure out that the problem is just shock at the change in air rather than an actual inability to breathe. The check can be repeated every 1D rounds until the Traveller has adjusted but during that time there may be complications.

The Travellers have emerged onto a low-lying island in a swamp. The teleporter disc stands more or less in its centre, as does the nest of a local predatory flyer. A pair of these highly aggressive creatures nest here and they have eggs to protect. Naturally they will attack the Travellers unless scared off by loud noises, bright flashes of light, or something similar. Travellers who are struggling to breathe suffer DM-3 on any actions they attempt until they adjust to the local conditions.

Animal	**Hits**	**Speed**
Swamp Flyer	16	2m
Skills	Melee (natural) 1, Recon 1	
Attacks	Claws and Beak (2D)	
Traits	Flyer (very slow)	
Behaviour	Carnivore, Hunter	



Once the immediate crisis is over the Travellers can take stock of their surroundings. They are on a small island in a swampy lake, heavily overgrown with lots of places for threats to lurk. In one direction there are thick, twisted trees not unlike a mangrove swamp but in the other is an area of more or less open water with other islands protruding. On one of them stands a strange octagonal structure. Yusote wanted the Travellers to investigate this area and take samples of soil, water and air. The structure will presumably be of interest too, although he did not specify.

TELEPORTER ISLAND (1)

The island is about 2m above the level of the surrounding water, which is only about 50 centimetres to one metres deep in most places. There is no evidence of significant tides, suggesting that this world has no moons of any real size. The island is choked with vegetation and it can be difficult to spot where the ground ends. A Traveller stepping onto a mat of vegetation rather than solid ground will fall into the water but this is more smelly and embarrassing than dangerous. The bottom of the 'lake' – if it can be called that – is muddy and thick with underwater plants. Slipping and tripping are a constant hazard which can be minimised by moving slowly and with care.

DEEP CHANNEL (2)

A deep channel runs through the lake, dropping to five metres in places. More commonly it is about two metres deep and can easily be swum. Travellers might spot the channel by way of ripples caused by a slight current, or they might find the ground falling away under their foot and plunge into water of an unknown depth. Plants and underwater creatures brushing a leg might cause some nervousness but the channel is not really dangerous in and of itself.

NATURAL CAUSEWAY (3)

A natural causeway crosses the deep channel. Its upstream side collects debris which is gradually building into a new island. More importantly it is an ideal location for one of the larger swamp creatures to deposit its eggs. These are not guarded as such but the creatures nearby will take an interest in anyone poking around near their eggs – or just crossing the causeway. There will be no immediate response but by the time the Travellers have investigated the octagonal structure they will find a dinosaur-like creature nosing about the causeway area. It will follow the Travellers' scent and begin moving towards them.

FALSE ISLAND (4)

This island is in fact an accumulation of floating vegetation around a few large rocks. Attempts to climb up onto it will result in Travellers falling into the vegetation-choked water between the rocks and possibly becoming stuck.

OCTAGON ISLAND (5)

This fairly solid island has few features other than the one-storey octagonal building. There are solar panels on the roof, providing a minimal flow of electricity and three chambers within. Two are bunk rooms for up to six people, with a fresher in between, and the third chamber is an everything-else room with a basic survival heater/stove. It is functional but has not been used in decades. In one of the bunk rooms is the skeleton of a Vargr. She wears a Scout Service coverall and her issued equipment is neatly stacked on one of the bunks.

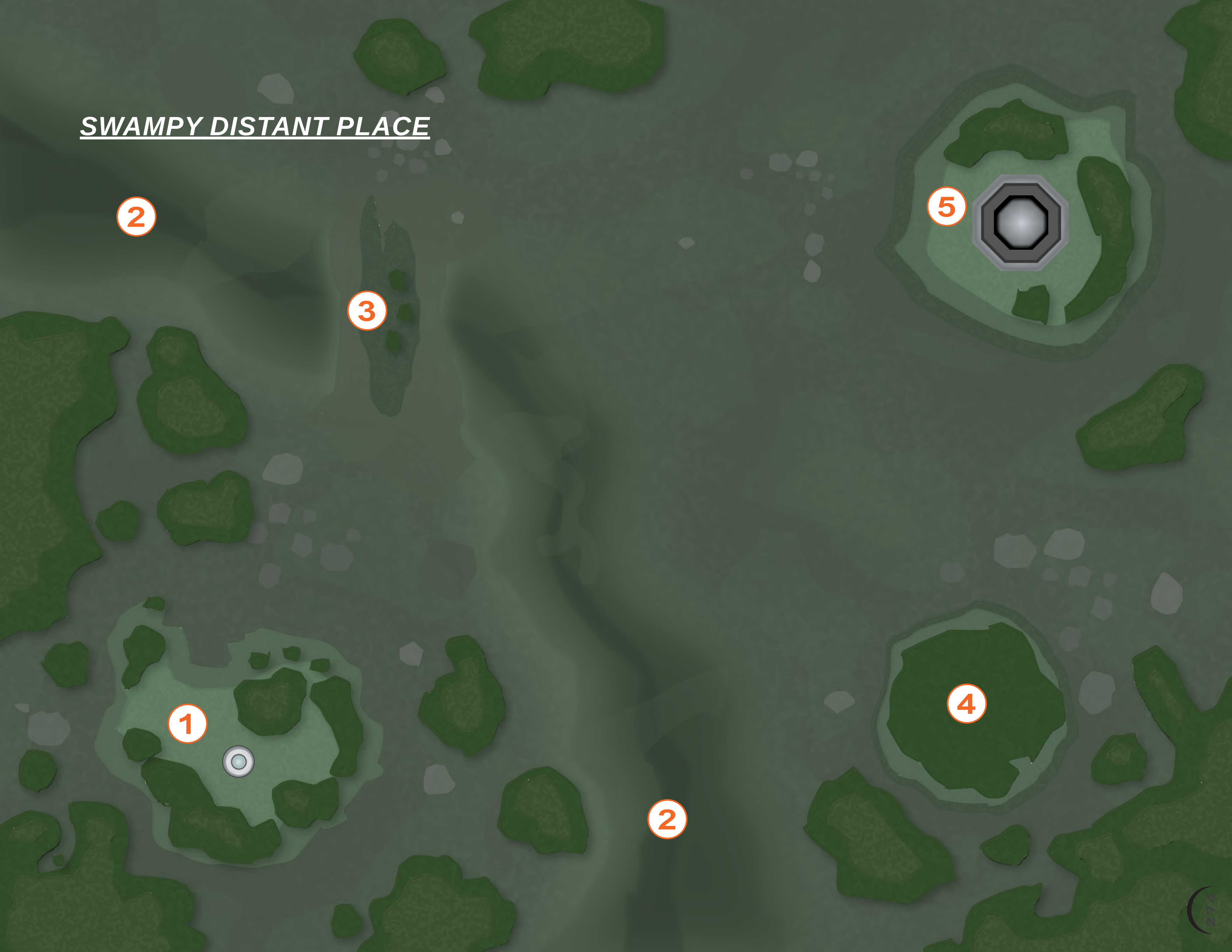
This is Uegvon Voegzllaz, once a member of Mercedes' crew. She went missing in the installation and was presumed dead. Apparently she passed through the teleporter and could not return. If the Travellers search they will find recordings she made over the next 40 years or so until the local environment finally killed her. The recordings occasionally break down into despair but mostly contain professional observations made whilst Uegvon explored her new home. She was a scout to the last and her family as well as the service would like to know what happened to her.

Analysing the recordings might eventually lead the Travellers to discover where the teleporter led. The shelter was built by the Octagon Society, which constructed shelters for distressed starfarers on frontier worlds. This planet must be somewhere near Imperial space but finding it is an adventure for another day. It might be worth the effort however; if the Ancients built a portal leading there, perhaps something else of theirs remains.

ANIMAL ENCOUNTER

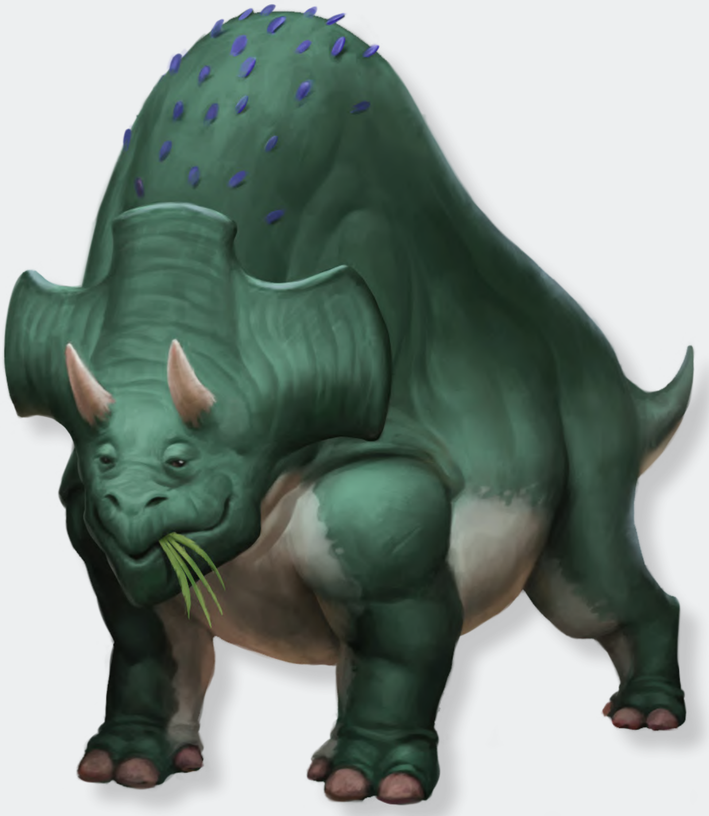
The dinosaur-like creature is not hostile but it wants to investigate the small creatures who disturbed its home. It will approach and bump Travellers with its head, or sniff them sufficiently vigorously that they fall over. This may be interpreted as an attack and if the Travellers hurt the creature it will retaliate. More importantly, it gives a great bellow that draws the attention of others.

SWAMPY DISTANT PLACE



This is a problem to be solved or a straight fight, depending on the inclinations of the Travellers. They might be able to distract the creature, scare it off or otherwise avoid killing it, but blasting the beast into bits will also work. Inventive Travellers might wonder what will happen if they somehow attach one of their teleporters to the creature. The answer is that it will work but the chamber at Twilight's Peak is too small for the animal. The result will be explosively messy, as some of its molecules interact with the walls causing a release of energy. The Travellers will end up with most of a carcass, partially cooked and partially exploded, and several very puzzled Droyne. Anyone in the chamber when the creature arrives may also suffer a molecular interaction with similarly destructive results. The Travellers could use their emergency teleporters to simply escape, of course, or to bring Uegvon's body back.

Animal	**Hits**	**Speed**
Swamp Dinosaur	100	4m
Skills	Melee (natural) 1, Survival 1	
Attacks	Head Bash or Tail Whip (6D)	
Traits	Armour (+8), Large (+6)	
Behaviour	Omnivore, Grazer	

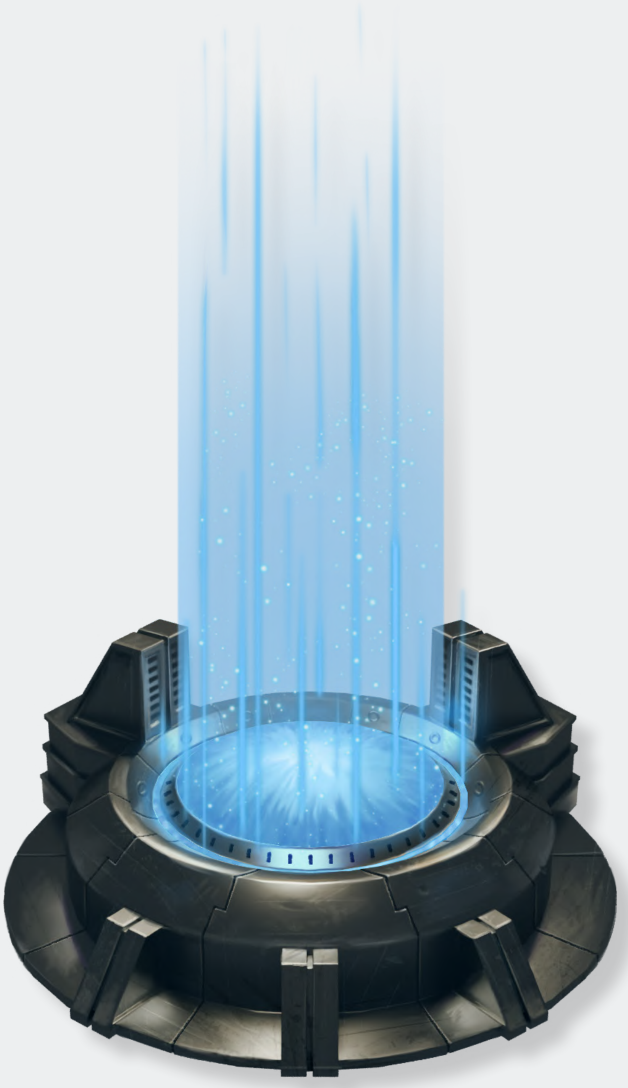


THE TELEPORTERS

Yusote's Technicians will unlock the emergency teleporters. They can be set by the Travellers to any location they are familiar with – their ship would be a good choice. This is done over 2D minutes of intense concentration and visualisation, and it might surprise the Travellers to find they can do it at all. The ability to interact with some psionically controlled devices is part of their uplift process, although they may not realise it at the time.

Each time a teleporter is reset to a new location there is a chance it becomes permanently locked. This occurs on 9+ on a straight 2D check. Once locked the teleporter can be used once more and will then become inert.

Item	TL	Kg	Cost
Emergency Personal Teleporter	?	60.8	Priceless



CRISIS IN TWILIGHT

Shortly after the Travellers meet Yusote, some of the base's drones become active. They have been sent by Tellsadiu to essentially poke the status quo and see what happens. The drones are not hostile as such but will deliberately run into Travellers or prod them with manipulator arms. The effect may be comical or a bit annoying, but no harm is done and the activities appear to be inspired by curiosity on the part of the drones.

This goes on for a while, with drones taking items someone was using and wandering off with them, or just being in the way. There is an element of 'cute robots' about all this which may lull the Travellers into a false sense of security. Then Diusk contacts the Travellers and wants to discuss a grave matter. A Technician is missing. He was last seen heading down to the lower level on an errand in the machinery chambers. Yusote wants to know if the Travellers were involved or if they have information.

Yusote of course has access to the internal security feeds for the outer base but according to Diusk there is no footage of what happened. A search party was sent but has returned without finding anything unusual. Yusote wonders if these suddenly-active robotic drones are connected to the disappearance. Perhaps if one can be caught and dismantled, Yusote's Technicians can learn what has happened.

Chasing robots might be entertaining but Yusote is looking in the wrong place. The Travellers might feel there is something familiar about the situation… someone is missing and nobody has any idea what has happened. A quick search by the Travellers will find proof. The Technician is dead, torn apart by claws and teeth, and the body has been stuffed in one of the cryo-stasis units which was previously sealed. The search party cannot possibly have missed the splashes of blood or tissue fragments.

Yusote and his people are particularly susceptible to the effects of the G482 creature due to their heritage and all have now effectively 'seen' one through their telepathic link to the Warriors in the search party. Yusote naturally assumes the Travellers are involved, especially since he can no longer read their minds. His logic is simple and seems concrete; one of his people is dead and a party of Travellers has suddenly developed mind shields. Something is awry here, and due to the effect of the G482 creature he cannot conceive of the correct explanation. The Travellers will have to convince him.

CONVINCING YUSOTE

Yusote and his people are logical and clever, and can be shown what is really happening or convinced through theoretical logic. They know their comrade was brutally slain and somehow there is no footage. On the other hand, the most likely suspects had to be shown how to use a sleep pod. There is little chance they could hack the base security system. Yusote is open to some other explanation but whilst it would be really easy to let him read the Travellers' minds and see they are innocent, they cannot yet control their new mental shields to let him in. Even an existing telepath's shield is jammed on at present due to the uplift effect the Travellers are experiencing.

That leaves good old-fashioned persuasion. The Travellers should be encouraged to roleplay their explanation rather than just making a check but a Difficult (10+) Persuade or Diplomat check will also be necessary. Some other skill might be substituted, such as Investigate. If so, the Travellers could explore their own actions to demonstrate they are not involved. Convincing Yusote of the existence of the creature will be harder, as his logic will war with his denial. He is willing to accept the possibility but does not really believe the Travellers.

There is one very easy way to demonstrate who did not kill the Technician – the internal security footage of the Travellers is entirely intact. If one of Yusote's staff can be induced to call it up, the Travellers can show they were elsewhere at the time of the killing. This could be a little embarrassing if they were doing something silly at the time like trying to surf down a corridor on a robotic drone but at least they will have established their innocence. The Travellers can also view the footage of the Technician's death, which does exist. Yusote's people deny its existence and even after watching it they forget what it has shown. There is a possibility that in order to rationalise what they have seen the Droyne become convinced they have just watched the Travellers murder their comrade.

Whilst this potentially dangerous situation is playing out, one of Yusote's surviving Technicians draws attention to the world-globe display. Two ships are entering orbit, on a vector that does not suggest they are headed to the human settlement. They are spiralling down into the twilight zone and can have only one objective.

THE NEW ARRIVALS

Yusote naturally wants to know what the Travellers know about these ships and it happens they know quite a lot. One of the two vessels is *Glisten Pearl*, which by now the Travellers know is a front for Omicron Division. What they tell Yusote about this is up to them but he does know of the existence of Omicron Division and its mission. Yusote can therefore draw his own conclusions when he realises the ships are headed for 'his' facility. The second ship is the Imperial Navy vessel INS *Rénszarvas* and has been borrowed from the 100th Fleet to escort the Omicron Division contingent aboard *Glisten Pearl*. The Travellers may have been unimpressed last time they faced personnel landed by that vessel but this time it is carrying a full load of Omicron Division shock troops.

There is no signal from the two vessels as they spiral down but their intent is obvious. Control screens show some of the hidden landing bays opening and Yusote's Technicans report that this is in response to a signal from the liner. They are unable to close the bays. At the same time new systems start coming online in the facility. Some of these were previously not suspected to even exist.

A lot happens at once. Readouts indicate that large numbers of robotic drones have become active and the cryo-storage units on the lower level are doing... something. Their shielding is sliding open, revealing mostly Droyne and a few humans inside. Drones are starting to remove the first people from storage. In orbit, the close escort INS *Rénszarvas* is destroyed. There is no dramatic weapon impact or even any sign of discharge. She is simply cut in half by an unknown, unseen force. Her aft section spins away, shedding plasma and the fore section starts falling towards the planet.

Glisten Pearl immediately enters a steep dive and her emisisons change. She has popped her turrets but there is no target. The gig breaks free from what is left of *Rénszarvas*, climbing towards orbit. It is suddenly spun up and away, coming violently apart as if flicked by a giant invidsible finger. The fore section of the *Rénszarvas* blinks out of existence, leaving only a few flashes of energy discharge and a cloud of metallic debris. If the Travellers have never seen one, Diusk can tell them this is a disintegrator weapon in action.

The disintegrator strikes again a few moments later, removing the fore section of *Glisten Pearl*. Just recently the Travellers were there, wearily enduring the Captain of Knowledge's bombast. Now the ship is flat-spinning, her pilot trying to regain control as she hurtles toward the surface. What is left of her crashes next to one of the landing areas and a moment later the internal readouts begin to show combat-armoured human troops speeding up the tunnels from the landing area. Others have used grav belts to escape the crash and entered through other landing tunnels.

Omicron Division is storming the installation. There is a G482 loose somewhere in the outer base. Robotic drones are breaking people out of cryostasis and waking them. Someone is firing a disintegrator weapon at incoming ships... and amid all this *another* vessel suddenly appears on the globe display. It must have been heavily shielded against detection by the base's advanced sensors. It drops an object and turns away, its hull sparking and glittering as a disingtegrator weapon is defeated by its shields. Accelerating at an incredible rate, the ship disappears – but it was there long enough to recognise. A Droyne ship, similar to that of Yusote but screened against disintegrators. Not quite well enough, it seems. The vessel was heavily damaged before it was hit and has now shed debris.

Diusk says one word: *Tayoyss*. Yusote sharply gestures him to silence.

THE STRUGGLE FOR TWILIGHT'S PEAK

The stage is now set for a struggle to take control of – and escape from – Twilight's Peak. The Travellers lack information and must make their decisions on the fly. They may already be involved in hostilities with some or even all of the factions, and sooner or later everyone will turn on each other. The question is not so much if that will happen but when and how.

TAYOYSS

Yusote knows the ship that briefly appeared and he is aware of what it has done. '*Tayoyss*', the word uttered by Diusk, translates roughly as 'multiply-falling destruction' – a description of a teleporter planet-buster bomb. If the Travellers do not hear the word from Diusk they will see it displayed on a control station or the globe displays. It may take some effort for them to find out what the word means but eventually the Travellers will obtain a display showing the device falling from orbit, teleporting back up and falling again. A simulation showing the devastation that will ensue should convince the Travellers of the necessity to vacate the base. However, there is a problem with that.

Once Tellsadiu realised the automated docking bays had been compromised, he locked down the installation. Teleporters will not work and the outer doors of the docking bays are now sealed. Psionic teleportation will still work, as will any teleportation device specifically authorised from the inner command chamber. All others are now inert. Tellsadiu is currently trying to stop the planet-buster using the disintegrator systems and the repulsor but it is not working. He is accepting of this; if he cannot present the installation to his master then a gigantic crater will bear witness to his efforts – and nobody else will have it.

Tellsadiu still hopes to save Twilight's Peak but needs to ensure the interlopers are dealt with just in case he succeeds. He orders some of the robotic drones to attack, whilst others open the cryo-stasis chambers containing G482 creatures and continue to wake humans and Droyne for conversion. He will also attempt an assassination of one of the Travellers using a drone. It is possible that by now the Travellers have stopped looking very closely at the drones and may not take any notice when one enters the chamber they are in. Anyone succeeding in an Average (8+) Recon check will realise there is something different about this drone. It has a device of some sort on top… a plasma cutter.

Those who make the check get to react before the drone opens fire. They have time for one action, which might be to push someone out of the line of fire, attack the drone, jump on it to try to tip it up and spoil the shot, or anything else the Traveller wants to do. Those who do not make the check are looking the wrong way and must hope someone else helps them. If this situation seems too likely to be lethal the drone can attack one of Yusote's people, or one of them might save the targeted Traveller if they are not yet at odds with the Droyne.

At this point, all hell has broken loose. It is likely that the Omicron troopers are fighting Yusote's warriors, drones are roving the corridors looking for someone to clumsily attack and of course there is a G482 on the loose. Yusote's people will eventually throw off the denial effect but for a period they are helpless. This will prompt Yusote to try to make common cause with the Travellers.

CRITICAL INFORMATION

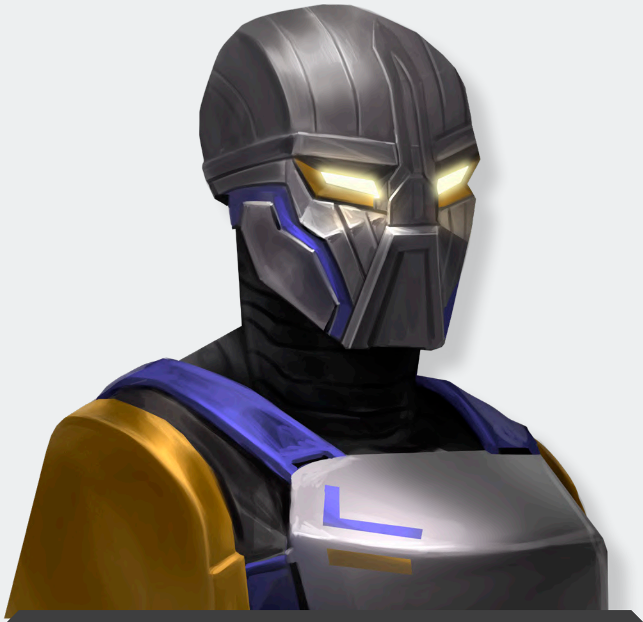
The Travellers need to be in possession of certain information at this point in the adventure. Ideally they figure out some of it for themselves but clues might be provided by data screens showing simulations of what is about to happen, or Yusote's crew might provide information. The critical facts are:

- There is another group in the installation and they have a higher level of control than Yusote.
- The landing areas and teleporters have been shut down, making escape impossible unless control can be gained.
- A planet-buster bomb is falling towards Twilight's Peak. The installation cannot survive a hit.

Yusote has instructed his crew to grab artefacts and prepare for a dash to his ship. He does not know for certain that the bomb cannot be stopped but has realised that either way someone has to get control of the installation, to either unlock escape routes or stop the bomb. Yusote therefore proposes an alliance. He will send his warriors to assist the Travellers in storming the inner base – if they want – or can use them to hold off Omicron Division. If the Travellers can broker an alliance with them, so much the better. Or the Travellers might draw them into an ambush and eliminate a threat. Yusote intends to betray and kill the Travellers once their work is done but if the installation cannot be saved there is little point to that. In such circumstances Yusote might – might – decide to let the Travellers leave with him or facilitate their escape.

If the Travellers are at odds with Yusote, the Omicron commander will offer a similar deal. Ideally, he wants control of the base and captives to interrogate but will settle for finding some way out. The Omicron offer differs a little from that made by Yusote in that Omicron Division do not necessarily intend to betray the Travellers. They will if they have to but live Travellers could be co-opted to work for the organisation or might at least provide information.

Alternatively the Travellers might realise for themselves that the key to survival is in the inner base. It is not yet possible to predict the impact time for the bomb but the expected time frame is minutes to hours. There is yet another complication at this point. Diusk is missing. This will make diplomacy with Yusote much more difficult.



OMICRON DIVISION SHOCK TROOPERS

SPECIES	GENDER	AGE
—	—	—

TRAITS			—	SKILLS
STR	10	INT	8	Gun Combat (slug) 2, Medic 1
DEX	9	EDU	7	
END	11	SOC	7	

WEAPONS	Gauss Rifle (4D, AP 5, Auto 3, Scope)
ARMOUR	Combat Armour with Psi Shield (+19)
EQUIPMENT:	Grav Belt

THE CORRUPTION OF DIUSK

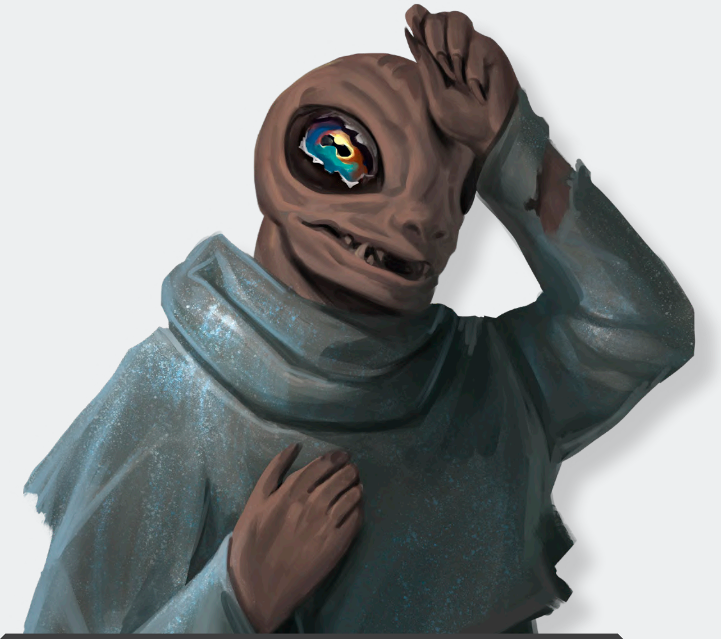
The Referee should not even attempt to keep track of everything going on. There is gunfire in the corridors, drones and Droyne and Omicron shock troopers everywhere. Closing down the cryo-stasis pods holding the G482 creatures should be a priority for the Travellers, unless they want additional invisible slaughter-machines running around the base. These are located in the bio-lab, which could be hard to get to given all the activity going on.

Shutting down the stasis pods is not possible; their controls have been locked out from elsewhere. Travellers could wait outside the pods and shoot what emerges but that is a labour-intensive solution which may be entirely impracticable. Causing critical damage before the waking process is complete will work if the Travellers can figure out how. One rather direct option is to damage an antimatter battery enough to cause a rupture. This will be sufficient to wreck a pod but it would not be wise to remain in the chamber during the process.

If the Travellers attend to the stasis pod problem they can prevent more G482 creatures from emerging but will still have to face one. At some suitably dramatic juncture a creature lurches into the chamber, misshapen and clearly changing before the very eyes of the Travellers. For the greatest dramatic effect this should be just recognisable as Diusk, although if he is already dead a Droyne less well known to the Travellers can be substituted. Diusk is not injured as such but his body is swelling and changing.

Diusk was grabbed by… someone… and dragged up to the machinery level where the teleporter was brought back into operation. He was taken before someone who thought he was very eminent, then held whilst a ritual was performed. It was not unlike a casteing ritual and soon afterward Diusk felt his body beginning to change. He is aware of what is happening to him; he is being changed into a G482. His mind is dulling and his desire for blood and slaughter is becoming overwhelming. He can show the Travellers how to get into the inner chambers and has a request in return.

If at all possible, Duisk wants the Travellers to save Yusote and the rest of the Droyne crew. He will accompany the Travellers and do all he can to aid them but he knows his identity is failing. He demands a promise; he will say his name every few seconds. If he has not said it for half a minute, the Travellers must kill him. This is for their protection to some extent but mainly for him; faced with an unimaginably awful situation he wants only to die whilst there is something left of Diusk.



MORPHED DIUSK

SPECIES	GENDER	AGE
Droyne	—	—

TRAITS			—	SKILLS
STR	15	INT	3	Melee (natural) 1
DEX	10	EDU	1	
END	9	PSI	10	

WEAPONS:	Claws, teeth and anything he can improvise (2D)
ARMOUR:	Shimmering Robe with Built-in Shields, Natural Armour (+6)

THE INNER BASE

The Travellers can find themselves at this point by a variety of routes. They may find the concealed shaft and explore, or use the teleporter in the machinery space. They may have assistance from Yusote's followers, the Omicron shock troops or Diusk… or they may be by themselves. However they get here, this is the finale of the *Mysteries of the Ancients*. What form the finale takes depends very much on the character of the Travellers. Some will expect a dramatic 'boss fight' for control of the installation whilst others will be entertained by a desperate escape. A more subtle approach is also possible, with the Travellers simply withdrawing from Twilight's Peak and allowing events to take their course. The Referee should tailor events to the campaign style, perhaps complicating matters with an Omicron Division assault or more G482 creatures for those who like a good fight to wrap things up.

If the Travellers arrive in the inner base with obvious hostile intent they will meet opposition but it is possible they can walk in and talk with Tellsadiu in a civilised manner. They will find him serene and confident even as his followers frantically try to blast the falling planet-buster with a disintegrator. Providing the Travellers do not behave aggressively or disrespectfully Tellsadiu will answer their questions and even provide advice. He will ask about Omicron Division and how they got into the base but already knows all about Yusote and his followers. If Diusk is with the Travellers, Tellsadiu ignores him completely. The Travellers might think Tellsadiu cannot perceive this twisted version of Diusk but in fact he has merely been discounted.

Tellsadiu remains on his command platform throughout any dealings and with good reason. It is shielded against psionics and disintegrators, and has a projected shield giving Protection +40. He feels safe from attack and in control of the situation despite the fact that he is most obviously not. He speaks slowly and as if each word was of the greatest importance despite the fact a planet-buster is inbound. In this, Tellsadiu is completely fatalistic. Either he completes his mission or his master knows nobody could have done more. He is satisfied and without desire; at peace despite the battle raging through the base.

If the Travellers ask to be let out of the installation, Tellsadiu will grant their request. They will be conveyed to the high entry point and simply allowed to leave. If that does not work for them, Tellsadiu promises to open any of the landing areas the Travellers can get to – with the exception of the one Yusote's ship is parked at. He will not discuss releasing Yusote and his people; they are enemies of his master and must be eliminated. The Travellers, on the other hand, are a possibly useful irrelevance. The same applies to the Omicron troopers.

The Travellers might be able to save the Omicron troops if they can persuade them to just stop fighting and leave. Of course, they will then have to deal with Omicron Division's uncompromising attitudes and could end up as prisoners of the people they just rescued. If the Travellers take the quiet diplomatic option they can simply walk away, with or without Omicron personnel. The only requirement is for them to hand over any Ancients technology they are carrying. If they do not think to ask for release, or find the terms unacceptable, the Travellers will need to eliminate Tellsadiu.

If Diusk is with the Travellers they will face a moral choice. At some point he stops saying his name. He looks around with an air of desperate terror, clearly beseeching the Travellers to end his torment. If they do, Tellsadiu is angered and orders his Warriors to shoot the Travellers down. They will have to fight. On the other hand, if the Travellers do not kill Diusk he will lunge at one of them – but only to push the Traveller out of his path. He flees out of the chamber. Tellsadiu is not angered at the Travellers for bringing him; this was an interesting experiment that might please his master. Diplomacy can continue after this incident but the Travellers will either have to fight or hand over their artefacts.

If the Travellers flee they will initially find they are stuck in the base. However, a heroic assault by Omicron Division or Yusote's crew or maybe what remains of Diusk will destroy the command chamber and kill Tellsadiu. The base's automated systems will make it entirely clear the Travellers need to get out and with the lockdown lifted they finally have some options.

ELIMINATING TELLSADIU

The simplest option is to kill Tellsadiu and try to gain control over the base. Simple, but not necessarily easy. Dealing with the guards is a normal fight but Tellsadiu is more of a problem. Enough firepower will breach his shield but smart Travellers might try something else. He is not protected against gas or secondary energy effects such as a primitive firebomb. Alternatively, the Travellers could wreck the command podium in the hope of putting the shield out of action.

The podium is built as solidly as the rest of the inner fittings – Protection +30. Its total hits do not matter; the Travellers do not need to destroy it. They need to damage the shield generation nodes or controlling electronics. Shooting blindly into the podium is not a reliable method; any penetrating hit has a 1 in 36 (12 on 2D) chance of hitting a vital component. If any damage penetrates the podium and hits one of these targets, roll 1D. On 1–5 a node is hit and the strength of the shield against kinetic and energy weapons is reduced by 2D. On a 6 the control system is put out of action and the shield goes down. At this point Tellsadiu is vulnerable to all attacks including disintegrators.

If the Travellers can obtain schematics of the podium or figure out where the nodes are likely to be, the problem becomes less severe. Ancients equipment is laid out rather differently to what the Travellers are used to, so just taking an educated guess requires a Formidable (14+) Investigate or Electronics (sensors) check with positive DMs for any experience the Travellers have had with similar devices. Once locations can be estimated the chance of hitting something vital increases to 8+ on 2D.

There are brute-force methods of breaching the podium and eliminating the shield. The most obvious is the weapons used by Tellsadiu's own guards. These can do 16D damage, for an average of around 56 points of damage, on full power. They are telepathically triggered and Tellsadiu does not expect mere insects like the Travellers to perform such a feat, so will ignore the threat until the first shot is fired. At that point the Traveller becomes a priority target for the remaining Warriors. Other methods, such as rigging an antimatter battery to rupture and having a hijacked robotic drone carry it in, have a good chance of success as Tellsadiu is distracted.

If the Travellers are failing to come up with a solution, fate may rescue them. If Diusk is still alive he re-enters the fight, staggering as his body changes and clinging to the last shreds of his identity… and also to an antimatter battery which is beginning to rupture. The Travellers will have a few seconds to vacate the chamber before it vaporises everyone inside except Tellsadiu. He is alive and unharmed in the wreckage of his podium but his shields are down. A Droyne Worker or Technician sent by Yusote could also perform this function, or a couple of wounded Omicron Division troopers might arrive in time to blast the podium with armour-piercing rounds from their gauss rifles.

This fight can be made more complex by members of other factions (Yusote and Omicron Division) joining in but possibly targeting the Travellers. Robotic drones and G482 creatures may also arrive during the fighting. The Referee should strive for as much chaos and confusion as possible. For his part, Tellsadiu more or less ignores attempts to kill him. He has wider concerns than the antics of irritants such as humans and is sublimely confident in his Warriors' abilities until it is far too late. He cannot comprehend the idea of surrender and will try to order Travellers around until they kill him. One thing he will do is direct his servants to stop trying to halt the falling planet-buster. If his master cannot have Twilight's Peak then nobody will.

ESCAPE FROM TWILIGHT'S PEAK

With Tellsadiu out of the equation, the lockdown ends and shut-down systems begin working again. Notably this includes teleporters. The defence systems cease attacking the planet-buster bomb and even if they can be restarted they cannot stop it. Twilight's Peak is doomed, although not everyone comprehends this yet. Yusote and Omicron Division will show their true colours at this juncture, if anyone survives from either faction. Both want control of the base and will use whatever level of force is necessary to obtain it. If the Travellers have maintained good relations with one or the other they may be able to do a deal but the terms will be biased against the Travellers – and the deal might not be honoured. Neither faction is receptive to news that the planet-buster bomb cannot be stopped.

It is clear the Travellers need to get out of Twilight's Peak. There are several options. If they have emergency teleporters they can simply blink out when they want to. The Chamber of Distant Access offers a way out but to an unknown destination. Hijacking Yusote's ship would be next to impossible but if friendly he might transport the Travellers out of the vicinity. There are also grav belts on the bodies of fallen Omicron troopers, which could be used to fly to the Traveller's ship. So could the internal transport devices used to get to the landing pads, or even a hijacked drone.

The Travellers will no doubt want to keep the installation or at least have time to loot it thoroughly. The Referee should ensure they truly understand there is no prospect of this. They leave or they become a hole in the ground. There is, however, just enough time to grab an object or two on the way out. Escape should be a chaotic matter. The base's systems are going haywire as a result of damage taken in the fighting. Drones are rushing around in a frenzy and attacking everyone in sight and there may be G482 creatures or confused innocents waking up from the cryo-stasis chambers. All of these factors will complicate matters. Travellers might find themselves pinned down by Omicron troopers who will just not understand that everyone needs to evacuate, or having to deal with some other last-minute obstacle. For some groups of Travellers the escape will be the high point of the adventure rather than overcoming the opposition.

Travellers who make their own way out of the installation may grab two items. Those who use an emergency teleporter to reach their ship have time for an extra one. This is in addition to anything the Travellers have acquired up to this point, including personal shields, gems and maybe weapons. If the Travellers are failing to come up with a way out there is one last chance for them but they only have time to grab one item from the list on page 284.

If the Travellers are completely stuck, they receive a signal from what remains of *Glisten Pearl*. She is missing her fore end but that does not contain the bridge. Most of the crew are dead but her pilot has managed to regain control and lift off. The vessel is tipping and wobbling about, and its systems will not hold for long. Debris falls from all surfaces every time the craft lurches but she is flying… sort of… and signalling.

'*Glisten Pearl*. Anyone left in the mountain. Standing off an opening high on a shoulder. Doors are open. Cannot land. Weapon incoming. Get to the lip and jump. You have… do it now or we're gone.' The voice is breathless and clearly in pain. Displays show the remains of the liner just below the high entry point. Someone with a grav belt could fly to her and anyone else could make a risky jump onto her upper surface. Travellers lacking a vacc suit might recall the goop-suit dispensers – they are present at the high entry point too. If the Travellers run they can just make it.

THE DESTRUCTION OF TWILIGHT'S PEAK

Yusote might or might not make it out of Twilight's Peak alive. He is inclined to stay and try to gain control of the situation, echoing Tellsadiu's hubris. If he is dead his crew do not even attempt to leave but remain with his body. Some of the Omicron troopers might attempt to reach their ship. However, it is the Travellers who are of interest. They may leap from the lip of the entry point or zip out of a landing area on a grav belt or internal transport platform. They might teleport to safety and make coffee for those who took a longer way around. What matters is that they get out; otherwise they will be destroyed with Twilight's Peak.

The destruction is spectacular. As the planet-buster makes its final decent it leaves behind an incandescent trail in the minimal atmosphere of Lydia. It is travelling impossibly fast, at a small percentage of the speed of light. The effect is more like a laser than a falling rock. There is a blinding flash as energy is released; so much energy that there is a thermal bloom as infrared energy heats everything it hits, with a pulse of ionising radiation. Then the shockwave hits, travelling through the bedrock. An instant later a wall of superheated vapour washes over rock surrounding what was until recently Twilight's Peak. The creatures in the crater are flashed to steam; the wreck of the *Glisten Pearl* broken up and tossed about. The destruction is complete.

It will take time for the debris to fall back to the surface, given the low gravity. Larger chunks of rock will start hitting the ground after a few minutes but the dust cloud will take years to dissipate. Twilight's Peak is gone, and with it the aspirations of a resurgent Ancient. For now, at least…

NO MEDALS NOR REWARDS

Mysteries of the Ancients ends in a manner that makes it difficult for Travellers to sweep up every coin, gem and brass nail in the place but it is not that sort of campaign. Indeed, it could be argued that the reward for having an adventure should not be loot drops but… having an adventure. However, there are chances for the Travellers to enrich themselves or grab unique items along the way. Those who made their own way out of the base may choose two items from the list below and those who had access to an emergency teleporter may choose an additional one. In-game, this represents being a little more sure there was time to get out and thus being able to grab additional items. In a metagame sense this is the payoff for assisting Yusote by taking on a mission with no obvious reward. Those who are rescued by *Glisten Pearl* may choose one item.

Grabbed Items

Item	Number Available	Notes
Yusote's Ship	0	Yusote's ship cannot be accessed. The bay stays closed and the ship self-destructs when Yusote and his subordinate Leaders die. If they are alive, they want to keep the ship. Either way the Travellers cannot have it but deserve respect for their ambition.
Yusote's Regalia	1	These must be taken off Yusote's body. It is not possible to put a simple value on such items. A collector might offer a lot of money but Yusote's Oytrip would be angered.
Yusote's Weapons	1	These must be taken off Yusote's body. It is not possible to put a simple value on such items. A collector might offer a lot of money but Yusote's Oytrip would be angered.
Droyne Weapon	Multiple	Weapons can be picked up from where the Warrior fell.
Omicron Grav Belt	Multiple	Travellers who think to grab one can get a grav belt in addition to other loot if they seek to escape via the high entry point.
Gauss Rifle	Multiple	These are found wherever an Omicron trooper fell.
Tellsadiu's Regalia	1	Assuming there is enough left of Tellsadiu to take this, its worth is impossible to estimate.
Tellsadiu's Disintegrator	1	The disintegrator will only work 1D more times once Tellsadiu drops it. The process to recharge it is unknown to the Travellers.
Tellsadiu's Warrior Plasma Weapon	2 or more	There is one per Warrior. Travellers who grab one in the fight can keep it in addition to other items – this does not count towards their allowance.
Personal Shields	Multiple	One example of each type of personal shield can be grabbed from bodies or the machines that make them, in addition to any the Travellers already have.
Antimatter Battery	Multiple	One battery is one 'loot item'.
Art Object	Multiple	A thing grabbed for its beauty.
Something Intrinsically Valuable	Multiple	A thing or things grabbed for their saleable value.

Travellers who want unique items may need to determine if they got there first. Anyone with three items to pick chooses their first before those with two, then everyone with two items chooses one before those with one to pick. Disputes are resolved either by the highest result on a straight 2D check or the Referee's judgement of a 'lore-off'. Whoever can present the best piece of Ancients lore (true or not!) gets to choose first. Travellers need to have access to where an item is and obviously anyone still alive will not part with something of theirs.

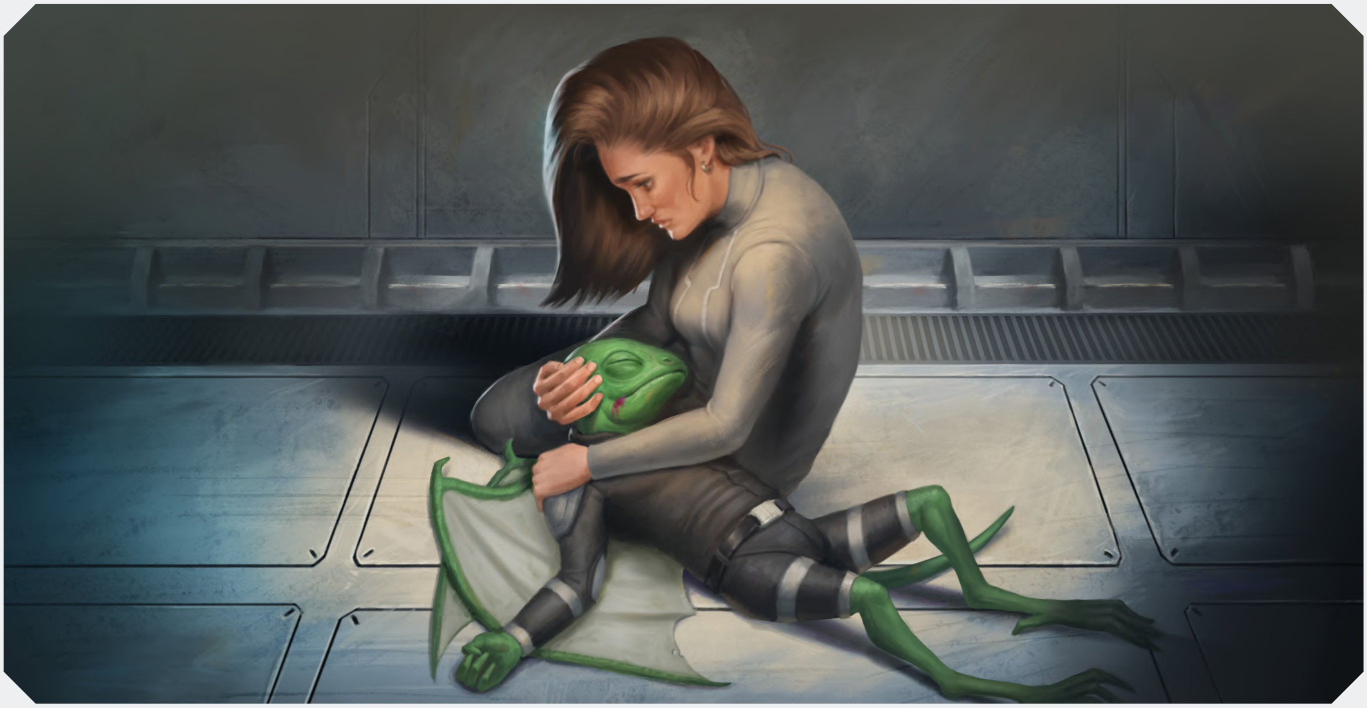
Most of these items are useful rather than specifically valuable but could be turned into money or advantage by clever Travellers. For example, Yusote's regalia might be worth a lot to an alien artefact collector yet far more to someone who could be convinced of the story behind it. Or the regalia might be returned to Yusote's Oytrip – not an easy undertaking – in the hope of opening diplomatic relations.

Art objects are essentially anything a Traveller hopes to display or sell. They are worth what the buyer will pay and Travellers who seek out a suitable market and make much of the story behind the item can get more. Alternatively, the item might be leveraged in other ways, such as creating a collection to impress people the Traveller wants access to. There is also an outside chance it is an artefact with a function the Travellers have not yet discerned.

Valuable items are anything else the Traveller hopes to sell. This might be a handful of ordinary gemstones, a couple of kilos of an extremely rare metal, or anything with a market value determined by factors outside the Ancients hunting world. Each 'something valuable' has a nominal sale value of Cr100000x2D. Attaining full value might take time and effort, however.

The Travellers are free to ponder whether half a million Credits worth of gemstones is worth more or less than a disintegrator that will only work three more times, or a shield against such a weapon. However, the physical items carried away are only part of the 'reward' for this campaign. In addition to the physical loot and any items the Travellers may have already acquired, they have begun an uplift process that will make them superhuman – or super… whatever their species might be. They can operate psionically triggered artefacts and have some defence against psionics. These are not spendable rewards but are worth having. In addition, the Travellers have gained knowledge and made contacts. Mercedes and Vlen are still out there and the Travellers have seen aspects of the universe that nobody else has. Whatever nonsense Wannabees like the Captain of Knowledge might spout, the Travellers have seen a real Ancients base… eaten its food… fiddled around with its control systems… been teleported to a strange world. They have been there and done that, and they know the truth.

Well, some of it at least.



AFTERMATH

Assuming the Travellers do not end up forming part of the cloud of ejecta surrounding the new crater on Lydia, they may be wondering 'what next?'. They would be well advised to remove themselves from the vicinity of Lydia, since the incident will have attracted attention. The planetary population will survive but there will be significant damage caused by quakes emanating from what is assumed to be an asteroidal impact.

The impact will draw in multiple ships; some of them from the Imperial Navy and Scout Service, some carrying research workers and some with a different purpose. The few who know there was something under Twilight's Peak will be intrigued at its destruction. Among them is Mercedes Karamaka, perhaps once more flying *Garnette*. She makes an unobtrusive sensor pass then departs quickly. Another vessel, ostensibly carrying investigators into the loss of *Glisten Pearl*, hangs around for a while. This is another covert Omicron Division vessel.

If Yusote survives and escapes, he heads for his Oytrip at best speed. The warship that caused all the destruction does likewise slipping away before a response materialises. The Travellers will not be able to track either vessel; neither takes a direct path and both are anxious to elude pursuit. Tellsadiu and his people will end the campaign in control of Twilight's Peak or dead in its ruins, and there are no traces of their ship. It was ordered to destroy itself when they arrived and dutifully crashed into the system's star.

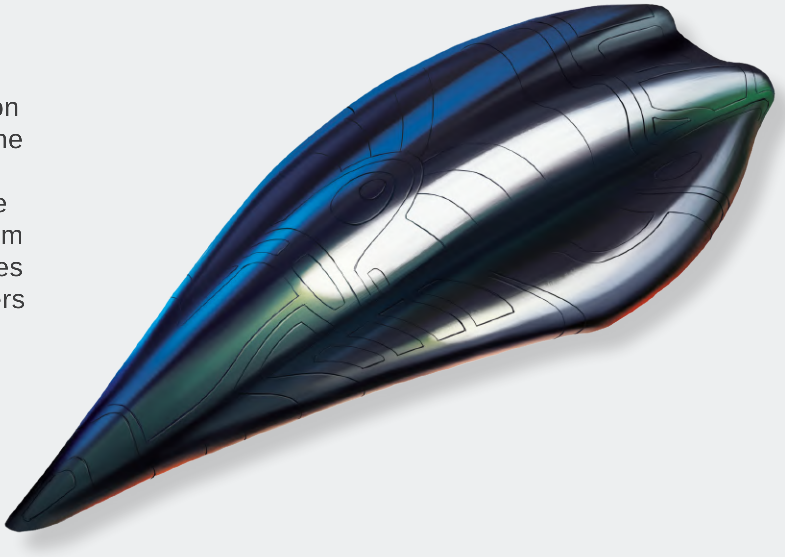
There will be an investigation of the new crater and questions asked about how an asteroid on a collision course with an inhabited world was not detected. The Travellers may eventually read a news story about the unusual composition of the crater ejecta and the possibility there may be other asteroids in the system bearing such minerals. A couple of mining companies eventually send vessels to investigate. The Travellers may be in the middle of another adventure by the time this happens but the Referee should let them enjoy a moment of satisfaction – they know what really happened in the Lydia system.

All this is well in the future, however. For now, the Travellers have learned some grave and frightening facts. The Ancients, it would seem, are real and present. At least one of them plans to return to Charted Space and the Travellers have seen what they plan for the insignificant species who dwell there. Perhaps the occasional brutality of Omicron Division is necessary after all.

The Travellers might decide to intensify their search for the Ancients but even if they do not they will be caught up in further events. It seems that Vlen Backett took a liking to them when they met and has charged them with a solemn task. A message arrives that he has died and according to his wishes the Travellers are to bear his body home. There is an inheritance to discuss as well.

This is the entry point to *Secrets of the Ancients*, a whole new campaign leading in turn to *Wrath of the Ancients*. By the end of that the Travellers will not only know more about the Ancients but will be powerful enough to oppose their return. Powerful enough that Omicron Division might consider them to be the new primary threat.

That is a story for another day, however…



THE UPLIFT PROCESS

The Travellers have been subjected to the beginning of an uplift process that will change them physically and mentally. It will take time, however, and little will be apparent during this campaign. The Travellers will realise, sooner or later, that something is happening to them.

The first stage of the uplift process concludes 2D hours after the strange sensation experienced by the Travellers. This period is one of intermittent headaches, nausea, vision and hearing problems. None of these are debilitating but they will cause the Traveller to worry about psionic attack, food poisoning or whatever else they blame. At the end of this period the Traveller's brain has been slightly altered. This can be observed using medical imaging equipment or the display from a sleeping pod. There seems to be no damage but there are some new links.

The first time the Traveller encounters psionics, such as one of Yusote's crew trying to telepathically scan them, they must determine their PSI score. This is a straight 2D roll with no modifiers for age. The Traveller has a mental shield which blocks psionic attacks and mind-reading attempts but at this stage they have no skills or powers. If a Traveller already had psionic abilities, they may re-determine their PSI score and keep the higher of their existing or new value. From now on the Travellers have a defence against psionics and will know when someone is using telepathy on them.

4D hours after the mental shield is formed, the Travellers undergo another small change. If they have not yet figured out what has happened, the Referee should ask them which of these sensations they are feeling:

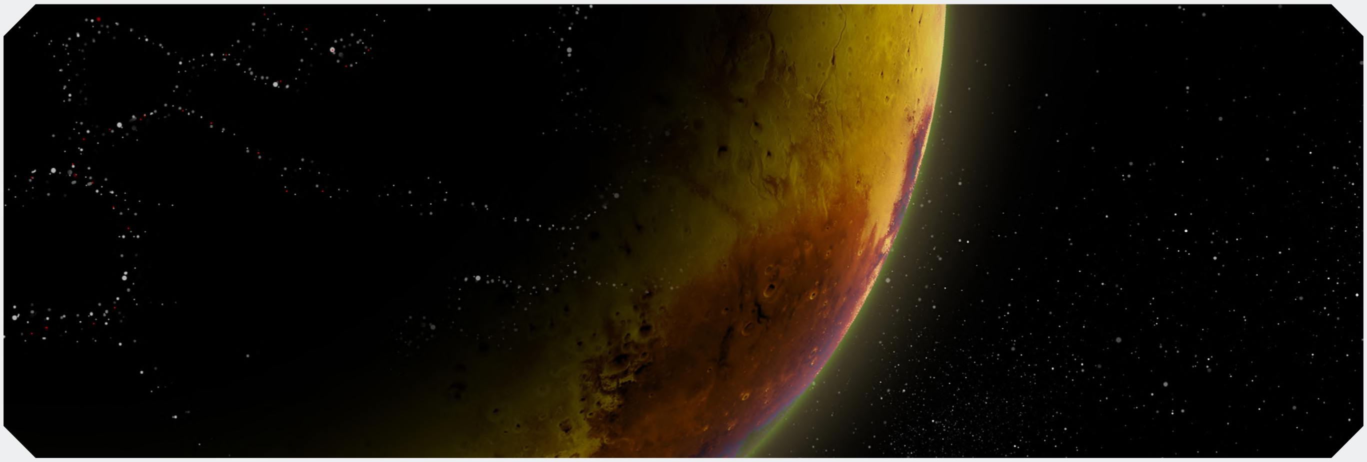
Tingling in the spine and nerve endings: The Traveller's nervous system is being streamlined. This translates as DEX +1.

Nausea and aches in lymph nodes and various internal organs: The Traveller's general resilience is increased by improving the function of defensive organs. This translates as END +1.

Weakness, trembling hands and sudden loss of control over extremities: The Traveller's musculature is being remodelled to be slightly more efficient. This translates as STR +1.

Blinding headaches and temporary vision loss: The Traveller's neural pathways are being streamlined. This translates as INT +1.

The process goes on intermittently for 2D hours, during which time each Traveller suffers DM-2 on all activities requiring the affected characteristic. They might not immediately realise what has happened but there is sufficient information about how G482 is made to suggest they are undergoing a similar process. The uplift process requires more triggers which are not available in Twilight's Peak, so these minor augments are all the Travellers will receive for now. Events during *Wrath of the Ancients* will complete the process, eventually placing the Travellers far above normal members of their species.



LIBRARY DATA

The following data is, for the most part, generally available from any library program. Some entries may have local variations or be unavailable for various reasons. The data presented here is what is available. That does not necessarily make it complete or even true. The Travellers may note that the Imperial authorities have the ability to censor datanets.

40th Squadron: The 40th Squadron is one of the best-organised Vargr bands in Gvurrdon. They are descended from a squadron of Vargr warships that survived the First Frontier War and established their own petty kingdom in the chaotic aftermath of the conflict. The 40th controls a loose alliance of a half-dozen systems. Individual planets have their own governments but the 40th Squadron's naval officers are the real power in the empire. The 40th lacks the resources to maintain its full fleet without external help; in the past, the Zhodani have propped them up to threaten the Imperium's flank.

Alell: Originally settled by the descendants of hotel staff, Alell has become a rich and influential world despite its extremely dangerous native wildlife. The population is clustered into a small number of fortified cities, although modern technology makes it possible to live in more rural areas. Alell's primary industry is tourism; secondary exports include wood, furs, pharmaceuticals and other material harvested from the jungles that cover 30% of the planet's surface area. Alell has a Class B starport whose original structure dates back to the First Imperium and is considered an excellent example of fin-de-siecle Vilani design.

Ancients: Colloquial name for a species of aliens that lived 300,000 years ago. Comparatively little is known about the Ancients. They are believed to be responsible for transplanting Humaniti from its original homeworld of Terra (see Solomani Hypothesis) and scattering the species across hundreds of planets. They are also believed to have uplifted the Vargr from Terran canines. The Ancients had an exceedingly high level of technology and many of their artefacts are millennia beyond even cutting-edge Imperial science. Estimates of high end Ancients technology place them beyond TL25.

Several Ancients sites have been discovered across Charted Space, especially in the Spinward Marches. Curiously, the technology at these sites varies considerably, suggesting different Ancients groups pursued radically different paths of development. Furthermore, most Ancients sites show signs of damage consistent with orbital bombardment or other violence; there are also anomalies in other systems that can be explained only by the use of weapons that destroyed entire planets. These facts, coupled with the sudden disappearance of the Ancients from known space, have given rise to Ancients Extinction Theories.

Ancients Extinction Theories: The Ancient race vanished abruptly some 300,000 years ago. This sudden extinction is a mystery to archaeologists, who have developed several competing theories to explain it. Mainstream theories are divided along two axes – the Heterogenous/Homogenous axis and the Catastrophist/Gradual Decline axis. The Homogenous Ancients school believes there was a single Ancients culture that expanded and then vanished; the Heterogenous school argues there were multiple competing cultures or a series of empires, or even multiple races that achieved high technology levels in the Ancients time period. The Homogenous theories explain the similarities between Ancients sites, commonalities in architecture, the use of Droyne as pets or servants and so forth. The Heterogenous theories seek to explain the wild variations in Ancients technology and architecture, the lack of any clear structure to Ancients territory and the sudden end of their civilisation.

The Catastrophists hold that a single terrible event ended the Ancients hegemony. Various candidate apocalypses have been advanced; Homogenous Catastrophists point to disease, a hostile alien race or a strange accident that wiped out Ancients civilisation. Heterogenous Catastrophists also suggest a civil war could explain the sudden disappearance. Gradual Declinists argue that a super-civilisation would be more robust and that the Ancients must have slowly declined in vitality and viability over a period of millennia.

Assumption of Custody: Under Regina law, the Public Order Commission has the power to detain suspects for up to a month without trial. Assumption of Custody is a process where multiple suspects of a crime are detained and questioned; these 'suspects' might just have been in the area of the crime, or match a profile, or even be randomly swept off the streets. Those Assumed into custody are innocent until proven guilty. Assumption is held to be a civic service and while a small stipend is available to those who are Assumed, it can still cause considerable inconvenience. Critics of the policy note that most citizens of Regina are never Assumed but certain groups – known criminals, transients, uneducated youths, Travellers – are regularly detained by the POC.

Beck's World: Former pirate base. Beck's World is a volcanic wilderness with a minimal biosphere and few natural resources.

Blanca: Blanca is a mysterious figure in the Ancients Hunter community. They are widely acknowledged as an expert, although some others who claim that title suggest Blanca is a fake. Nobody seems to know who Blanca is, or anything about them, since their datacasts never contain real images of the person making them. Instead Blanca is represented by a swirling multicoloured energy vortex which is really quite hard on the eyes.

Boughene: A scout base is established at Boughene, as part of the continued surveying operations coreward and spinward of the Imperium. There is little else in the system of interest to Travellers; the scout base is not open to visitors.

Brotherhood of Humaniti: A quasi-religious group that arose following the confirmation of the Solomani Hypothesis that all Humaniti stems from a single source. The Brotherhood believes that all humans should come together as one species, united under a common government. As such, any government or institution that opposes such radical unity is an enemy of the species and must be destroyed. Since its inception, the Brotherhood has moved towards mysticism, attributing increasingly unlikely supernatural powers to 'true Humaniti', the ur-race that was destroyed when the Ancients divided Humaniti into different 'tribes'.

Cadgeree: The cadgeree resembles a winged snake with a spiked tail. Cadgeree are extremely effective predators, who attack by hurling themselves down on prey from a great height, embedding their tail spikes deep into the target's flesh. The serpent then thrashes wildly, snapping the spine of its victim with ease. Cadgeree usually attack smaller creatures but have been known to attack humans when hungry.

Callia Link: The Callia Link is a notorious break in the trade-chain facilitated by the Spinward Main. In theory, a jump-1 ship can wander all over the sector, trading as it goes. In practice, on any long main there may be systems like Callia where there is no proper port to buy fuel, no gas giant to skim it from and no surface water on the mainworld. In some cases these breaks are covered by a refuelling station but that is expensive and volume of traffic might not be sufficient to justify the project. Tankers are sometimes deployed to take advantage of the captive fuel market. The Scout Service occasionally has the weary duty of keeping these links open but in the case of the Callia Link it is a private firm, subsidised by the subsector administration, which operates the tanker.

Captain of Knowledge: The 'Captain of Knowledge' is a minor datanet personality who holds forth on diverse subjects. He is considered by most to be a fringe figure with little real knowledge but is widely revered within the Ancients Hunter community.

Church of the Chosen Ones: A Vargr religious sect who believes Vargr are the chosen heirs of the Ancients and therefore the rightful rulers of the galaxy. The Church was at its height some 200 years ago and today is more of a fringe cult.

Church of Stellar Divinity: The Church of Stellar Divinity is one of the largest religions in Charted Space and not coincidentally it has a number of subdivisions. The basic concept is that stars are gods, although interpretation of this varies. Some say that all stars are divine, others than only some are. Likewise, opinion is divided as to whether a star itself is a god, or a physical manifestation of a god, or that the gods are associated with stars rather than *being* stars. The latter is known as the Association Heresy and is vigorously challenged by the mainstream church.

The church is generally well-respected and associated with positive deeds. Most worshippers are fairly passive, attending services personally or by datanet, but a significant number are engaged in various forms of field work. This can be working with the poor on their homeworlds or, in some cases, forming assistance groups who try to reach disaster zones in time to help.

Credo: Capital city of Regina, with a population of 87 million. Located on the eastern edge of the continent of Noncredo. Credo prides itself on its cosmopolitanism – it has a high transient population, including many visitors from the Core worlds. Fashion and culture on Credo are heavily influenced by these visitors, leading to tension between Credo and more traditional cities on Regina. The city is sometimes called 'little Capital', a mocking reference to Credo's mimicry of Imperial high culture. Despite its cultural pretensions, the curious and strict legal system of Regina is still in effect here – laws must be voted on by the entire population and the justice system is as bureaucratic as it is enthusiastic, without being efficient at either. See Public Order Commission.

Dandelion: See Llellewyoly.

Dancado: Forested region north of Credo City; private property of the Duke of Regina.

Efate: With its high Tech Level and population, Efate is almost as influential as Regina. It is a major crossroads for trade and Imperial naval operations – the 213th fleet is headquartered here. Visitors to Efate are cautioned that local customs and cultures are prone to change over short periods and that the pace of life here is uncomfortable to many. To quote the Efate tourist board – live fast, die young, get resurrected by our advanced medical technology.

Feri: Travellers are advised that a civil war is underway on Feri and the world has a provisional Amber classification. The starport is under Imperial protection but other regions are subject to unpredictable violence.

Garnette: *Garnette* is a modified scout/courier operating mostly in Spinward Marches sector. The vessel is known to have been decommissioned by the Scout Service and privately refitted. She has passed through several hands, gaining value by way of her reputation. *Garnette* is considered to be something of a status symbol among the Ancients Hunter community and several notable figures have offered more than her worth to obtain her.

Hell: The Fuller Experimental Mining Installation in the Caledonia system is commonly referred to as 'Hell'. The nickname was popularised by the docuvid *A Season in Hell* which was recorded shortly after the installation was constructed. The installation is known to be currently operational.

Hos (Staff): Term used to denote an inferior or servant in Alell culture; derived from old Vilani dialect term 'hos'ai', servant or staff used in the catering industry.

Jonkeereen: Jonkeereen are an artificially created human variant, optimised for desert conditions. They were genetically engineered starting in 528 and introduced to Jonkeer at the end of that century. Today they are found on many desert worlds, often living apart from mainstream humans. Conflict is rare, since Jonkeereen can live comfortably in conditions that normal humans cannot tolerate. On some worlds a partnership has evolved, with Jonkeereen and humans meeting to trade and even socialise, but living apart most of the time.

Kaldi Research: Kaldi is a private corporation with two main branches. The bulk of Kaldi's assets are employed in fixed installations that undertake research on contract for corporate bodies and planetary governments. A much smaller proportion of Kaldi's effort is placed into the operation of a number of laboratory ships that travel throughout the Marches and beyond, either hiring out their services to whomever needs a general research team or engaging in ongoing studies.

Knorbes: Knorbes is an Imperial game reserve; hunting permits are available to citizens of excellent standing from the starport. Visitors are advised that Knorbes is a technologically restricted zone and permits are required to use any advanced technology outside the confines of the starport.

Lagrangian Point: One of five points in a three-body orbital configuration where a small object affected only by gravity will be stationary relative to the two larger bodies. In the Assiniboia system with its multiple moons, there are several semi-stable points.

Lambdragon: Large herbivore common to the Alell jungles. Lambdragons slowly graze through the forest, eating from the treetops. They have few natural predators, due to their size and the protection of the pack. The term 'lambdragon' was given to them because of their perceived gentleness but attacks by lambdragons are not impossible. The creatures have surprisingly sharp teeth for a herbivore (more accurately, they have two sets of teeth – an exterior set of flat teeth for feeding on leaves and a retractable set of sharper teeth used in defence and mating rituals) and a stampede of lambdragons can flatten a tank.

The creatures reproduce by depositing egg sacs in hollows in trees. The larval lambdragon feeds on the interior of the tree and 'hatches' when the weakened tree collapses. The passage of a large herd of lambdragons can cause sizable seismic tremors, causing trees to fall and thus bring new dragons into the herd.

Llellewyoly: The Llellewyoly are a minor race native to Junidy in the Aramis subsector of the Spinward Marches. They are nicknamed 'Dandelions' or 'Dandies', as they resemble a two-metre-tall version of a Terran plant, with five stalk-like limbs that are used for manipulation, movement and sensing. Llellewyoly are highly intelligent and have excellent memory recall and organisational skills, possibly as a result of their incredibly complex social structure. A Llellewyoly possesses dozens of formal titles simultaneously and addressing it by the wrong title is a grievous insult. They are rarely encountered outside their homeworld.

Mad Captain Maddox: Captain Maddox is one of those figures about whom a great many tales are told but which lack critical details. Listeners are often too focused on the amazing things that happened to notice that there is no information on Maddox herself. Nobody seems to know who she really was or where she came from. The tales tell how she bought and refurbished an Imperial Navy carrier along with multiple smaller ships, then set out on an exploration cruise searching for… something or other. Most tales concern attempts to find or penetrate Ancients bases but Maddox is credited with many other exploits besides.

Maleficent: Infamous and mysterious predators of the Alell jungles, maleficents are fast and brutal creatures. They are jet-black in colour, although markings can be seen under ultraviolet light. They travel through the trees by means of tentacles, snaking along the canopy in search of prey. Little is known about their biology but some scientists believe they are not originally native to Alell.

Menorb: An unremarkable agricultural planet, known mainly for producing food for export to the Vargr market. Unfortunately, this has drawn more than its share of raiders, who snack on Menorb before moving on to more profitable targets.

Omicron Division: The term 'Omicron Division' appears in a variety of conspiracy theories and diatribes posted by fringe datanet personalities. There is no evidence any such organisation exists.

Oyntrip: A Droyne unit of social organisation, ranging in size from a handful of individuals to the population of a whole planet. Roughly cognate to a 'clan' or 'nation'.

Paper Trail: The use of electronic data storage and transfer is highly convenient but not perfect. The auto-deletion of works by the Ancients authority known as 'Professor A' is one example of how linked data can suddenly disappear. It is widely believed that there are algorithms lying in wait on the Imperial datanets and x-boat networks which erase documents containing references to certain subjects, or direct agents to both sender and recipient. Whilst many believe this is paranoid nonsense, some documents exist only in hard copy. The information within them is transmitted only in written form, leading to the claim that 'if you want to find the truth, stay off the datanets. Follow the paper trail.'

Pixie: The Pixie system is home to a forward operating base of the 213th Fleet. Travellers are requested not to travel to this system without due cause. The only civilian port is home to a small community of belt miners.

Professor A: Professor A is one of the most rational 'unofficial' authorities on the Ancients. His real identity is unknown and given that he first emerged over a century ago he is unlikely to still be active. Nevertheless his work is considered sound by most serious Ancients Hunters. He contends that the Ancients were an unknown species, definitely not human, but who interacted with humans during their development. The professor's style is rigorous and academic, even when presenting far-fetched ideas. Unlike many other Ancients 'experts', he clearly states what is conjecture and what is likely-to-be-fact and ties his theoretical work into real, provable dates and events. His is the most convincing argument for the Ancients as the reason humans and Terran creatures are so widespread. Unfortunately his work was suppressed in the 1080s, starting with a sudden auto-deletion of electronic copies. Today it is hard to come by, to say the least.

Public Order Commission: The local police force of Regina. The moon is Law Level 9, banning most personal weapons. Public Order Commission officers are also empowered to detain individuals or confiscate items that are judged to be 'disruptive or damaging to public order and safety'. In the past, this has been used to control technologies or restrict the movement of visitors to the moon. In practice, the POC is much more lenient in the most cosmopolitan cities; visitors to the less trafficked regions of Regina are advised to exercise caution.

Regina: The capital of the Regina subsector and seat of the Duchy of Regina, this is one of the most important worlds in the Spinward Marches. It is a bulwark against Zhodani aggression and the largest trade hub in the sector. Vessels travelling along the Spinward Main from the Core worlds often offload their cargoes at Regina, leaving smaller local traders to carry the goods on to the lesser systems. Regina Highport sees more traffic in a day than some lesser systems see in a decade.

Technically, Regina is a moon, not a planet; it orbits the gas giant Assiniboia, which itself orbits the locus of the primary star Lusor and its companion star Speck. There is a third star in the system, a red dwarf on a long eccentric orbit.

Regina Highport: This Class A starport is one of the largest ports in the entire sector. Over 80% of the cargo that passes through Regina is destined for other worlds in the sector, so most of the port is given over to cargo handling and warehousing. The port itself is located in geostationary orbit over Regina Downport and Startown, which is located halfway between the cities of Credo and Atora.

Roup: Roup is a water world. The only stable 'land' consists of synthetic islands grown from webs of micro-organisms and seaweed. These huge rafts support vast cities, factories, farmland and even the starport. Roup's citizens practice aquaculture on a planetary scale, with whole oceans sectioned off using bubble-nets to maximise productivity.

Rustic Idyll: *Rustic Idyll*, flagship of Captain Maddox' flotilla, was formerly the Imperial Navy strike carrier *Akhama*. Withdrawn from service in 1006 after receiving heavy damage during the Solomani Rim War, *Akhama* was redirected en route for disposal and given an interim refit at Harmony in the Daibei sector. She was transferred coreward and entered an unknown shipyard from which she emerged heavily modified as *Rustic Idyll*. The vessel was posted missing, presumed lost in 1019.

Rynkatropa: The Rynkatropa are a minor race of sophonts who resemble ambulatory sea slugs. They have three pseudopods that they use to manipulate objects and move on land, and communicate by whistling. They have four sexes (male, female, neuter and incubator) and had just reached TL1 when they were enslaved by the Vargr.

Solomani Hypothesis: The theory that Humaniti originally evolved on the planet of Terra, the home of the Solomani. According to this theory, the Ancients transplanted primitive humans to other worlds in the galaxy, most notable the homeworlds of the Vilani and Zhodani. Genetic evidence has largely confirmed the Solomani Hypothesis, although some scientists and religious groups advocate other origins for Humaniti, such as parallel evolution or divine intervention.

Startown: The region around the old Regina starport, now the primary downport. This strip of bars, cheap hostelries, raucous entertainments and less savoury businesses is notoriously violent, corrupt and profitable. Technically, it is divided between the nearby cities of Credo and Atora; both blames the other for the state of Startown.

Siu (Guest): Term of respect used on Alell, derived from old Vilani dialect term 'Siu'ch', meaning guest or honoured visitor.

Tusal: Tusal is an illegal narcotic, usually sold in the form of tablets, although some prefer it in its less processed, undried form as a wad to be chewed. Tusal is derived from a seaweed. The origin of the drug is unknown but is believed to have been imported from the Vargr extents a century ago and is now grown on various worlds along the Corridor sector. A dose of tusal produces mild euphoria and intoxication; a very strong dose can dull pain receptors and cause unconsciousness. As a tusal user can remain functional while under the effects of a low dose, many addicts chew six or seven tablets per day to remain in a constant drugged haze. Tusal is especially associated with menial jobs and the unemployed, as an otherwise dull life of drudgery can be made pleasant by the drug. Long-term effects of tusal addiction include respiratory and digestive problems, and a high incidence of stomach cancer.

Twilight Zone: On a tidally locked world one face is always 'bright', facing towards the stat, whilst the other is 'cold' or 'dark' and perpetually faces away. Between these two areas of extreme conditions is the 'twilight zone' where some light and heat are received. It is common to build starports and settlements in the twilight zone unless there is a good reason why another location is more suitable, usually connected with resource extraction.

Twilight's Peak: Twilight's Peak is the title of a novel written in epic poem style, supposedly telling the tale of an ill-fated convoy during the Third Frontier War.

Uakye: Uakye is tidally locked, so all settlements are in the habitable 'twilight zone'. The planet is closely associated with Efate but Countess Parasii strongly affirms her planet's independence from the technocracy one system over.

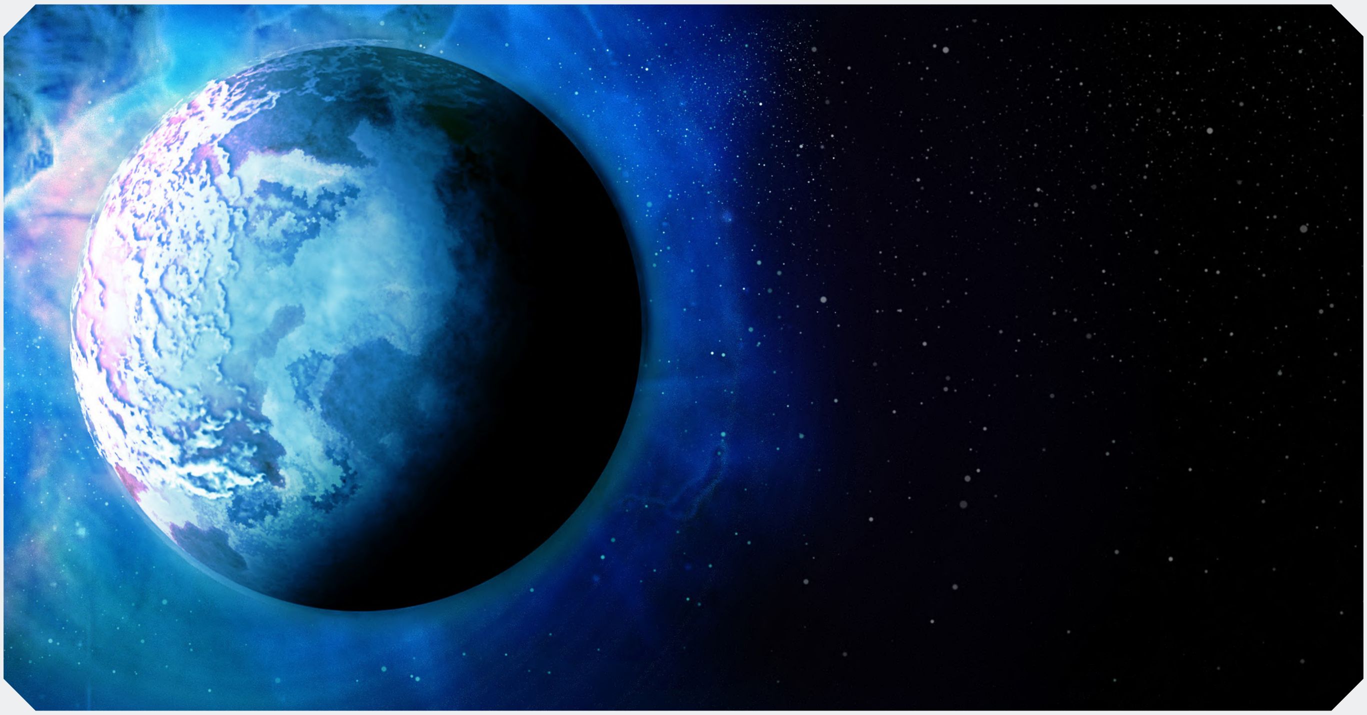
University of Regina: Commonly used to refer to any of several prestigious academic institutions on Regina. Collectively, the University of Regina is the largest and most successful higher-level education and research facility in the Spinward Marches.

Whisperhawk: One of the most common sights in the jungle, whisperhawks are beautiful avians with prodigious wingspans. The hawk's wings are both locomotion and feeding organs – whisperhawks feed by digesting the insects that are caught on the sticky underside of the wings. A flock of hawks can glide across the jungle canopy at twilight, catching hundreds of thousands of insects as they fly. The buzzing of the trapped insects and the susurrus of the wind gives the whisperhawk its name.

They are notoriously stupid creatures and have been known to attack humans and vehicles (as well as flagposts, fences, houses and even small trees). If threatened, whisperhawks attack by wrapping their wings around a larger foe and trying to smother it.

Wochiers: The atmospheric pressure at sea level on Wochiers is more than four bars; the population therefore live in the mountains or in underground complexes. The high pressure makes Wochiers ideal for certain engineering projects, especially crystal growing. By tradition, all visitors to Wochiers must bring an offering of a living plant to the hydroponics caves; suitable plants are available in the starport gift shop.

Yres: The only surface structure on Yres is the entrance to the starport, which is an extremely impressive system of airlocks and tubes reaching from the surface to the seabed. The cities of this balkanised world are all underground and underwater. Visitors face an additional docking fee of Cr250, which is an obligatory donation to the Yres Reconstruction and War Widows Fund. The atmosphere is highly radioactive; iodine tablets are available from public dispensers throughout the cities.



DATA FILES

In the course of the campaign the Travellers may come across detailed files containing potentially useful information. These files are presented below.

ON THE ANCIENTS

This file is found on the data chips aboard *Garnette* and was authored by Bernadatta Khaled.

The Ancients. They existed, for sure.

Current theory (mine) is that the Ancients were not a single group. Multiple sources of activities, plus they fought among themselves. Also different ways of tackling the same problem. So there were factions. I have discounted the possibility the Ancients fought an external enemy, must be factions.

I now believe the Ancients were artificial intelligences. Possible upload of consciousness. I think they built supercomputers to do stuff for them and became servants to their creations. Lots of fleshy mortals making up 'Ancients Society' but the real brains were computers. Or transferred to computers. They dreamed the big dreams, got the people to do the work. Fell out among themselves and fought. Didn't care about the fleshies.

That explains a lot of what we know happened. Maybe they took one another out by killing off the servitor populations. Maybe the servitors rebelled. That explains the war machines on Vland. Explains… bit of a strong word but the concept fits the hypothesis.

So, servitors. Humaniti and Vargr for sure. Others? Maybe. Droyne are real scared of Ancients gear. Maybe they remember something. I'd ask Yusote but he's got a disintegrator with my name on it these days. Another fence to mend. Or maybe Mercedes knows something. But she'll want the ship back in return I bet. Things to ponder…

YUSOTE

This file is found on the data chips aboard *Garnette* and was authored by Bernadatta Khaled.

Yusote. Droyne Leader. Unknown origin. Andor and Candory deny ever hearing of him, but I know his ship has been there. In possession of advanced tech. Life support suit, disintegrator weapon. Fanatical followers. Ancients gear? Not sure. Seems to be looking for something. Willing to trade information. Well, was. He must have figured out I lied about the site on Melior. But then so did he about what they found on Judice. Almost got me killed.

So, don't trust Yusote.

Active in the Five Sisters around 1090, fell off the scanner for a decade, then turns up at Glisten claiming to be an ambassador for a community that doesn't exist. Again, don't trust Yusote. He was right about Omicron Division though. They are, indeed, a thing.

TOWARDS A UNIFIED ANCIENTS THEORY

This summary can be compiled from the works of Mercedes Karamaka with a great deal of work, or might be presented by her to those she feels are worthy.

The Ancients were in fact multiple factions within an overall society that might or might not be considered to be 'the Ancients'. That is to say there was a starfaring society which seems content to live comfortable lives and do mundane things, within which were powerful groups intent of a greater destiny. Or destinies; on some occasions, at least, these factions were at odds with one another.

It is certain the population of this culture included Droyne, Humaniti and Vargr. What species their leaders were is unknown and may be immaterial. What is known is their works. Terraformed worlds, altered species, transplanted populations. And the war machines. If the Ancients in their heyday faced any true threat is hard to say, but they knew how to destroy on a great and small scale. Small, in the sense of wiping out a sentient species that did not have the tech to fight back and great in the sense of shattering planets. They had the means to do so and they were entirely willing. Perhaps this is the fate of greatness – to achieve wonders a society must be willing to inflict horrors.

It is possible to think of the time of the Ancients as 'sharks and minnows' but that is an inadequate analogy. The Ancients were nuclear-powered gods among a galaxy of toddlers. Some of them may have cared for the people they ruled and directed but they ruled and directed nonetheless. They were gods who demanded obedience and punished dissent. In their time there could be no other greats – just the Ancients and their subjects. That, it seems, was their downfall.

There are indications of small-scale conflict as subjects were 'corrected' and minor threats squashed. These are quite different from the planet-smashing events at the end of the Ancients era. It would appear that various factions fought one another with varying degrees of savagery and using different methods. Where some factions appear to have preferred direct action in the form of surface combat others used bombardment to render planets uninhabitable or simply destroy them. Biological weapons were introduced either directly against planetary populations or to disrupt an ecosphere and cause a die-off. Alternatively, such weapons could be used to coerce a population to change sides. After all, even gods need servitors.

The varying tactics do not necessarily indicate differences in culture and thinking between the factions but the methods suggest different preferences. Some factions seem to have liked simple high-tech weapons – disintegrators, antimatter bombs and the like – whilst others made biological weapons. Not just viruses and the like but living weapons. Psionics were also used but it may be that the most potent forces were psychological. Forcing a faction to fight another removed two opponents from the playing field and this might be the way whoever 'won' the war did it. There are multiple cases of actions taken the long or hard way when destruction would have been easy. Did the Ancients seek to gain control over rather than destroy their enemies? That would fit some of the evidence and certainly it would be a sensible strategy.

Whatever happened, they failed. The war came to an end and there is a distinct lack of great works being undertaken ever since. At first I assumed this meant total destruction of the Ancients culture or the loss of any means to continue the conflict in a meaningful manner. Perhaps the factions became weaker and weaker, feebly flailing at one another until they were exhausted. But even a remnant of the Ancients would be vastly above the pitiful servitors. So why are there no signs of a diminished but still powerful civilisation?

There are two possibilities:

1. *All the remaining factions simultaneously (in astro-historical terms, anyway) reached a point where they could not maintain their technology. They collapsed back into regressed societies. Maybe the guy who thinks Earth, Vland and Zhodant are such regressed Ancients states is right? Unlikely.*
2. *They did not.*

If 2, then what happened? What if the number of players was reduced but some factions remained powerful? What if they made a truce, or bunkered up in their homelands, or hid from one another? What if they moved away from this region, put some distance between them and started again?

It does not matter. 2 = problem.

If 2, they are not gone. If not gone, they can return.

WHERE ARE THEY?

Are they hiding in plain sight among us? Do they have agents shaping our future? Are they halfway to the galactic rim on a million-year pleasure cruise? Are they buried and sleeping beneath the methane ice of a distant moon?

And if we find them, what then? Invite them back to rule us? Try to eliminate them? Open them up as a new market for whatever the latest big selling product is? If we find them, we will be unable to resist doing SOMETHING and we might not need to do anything to attract their attention. Will they swat us like upstart bugs? Make us slaves? Pit us against one another or send us to fight some new foe they have found?

Is it better to stop looking and hope they do not return, or to search and make an informed decision? Is there a decision to be made? Once contact is established they will do as they please. We can comply or we can die – if they let us.

The more I refine the data and project the trends, the more certain I am.

They still exist. And they are coming back.

SUMMARY OF TWILIGHT'S PEAK

If the Travellers manage to create a summary of the text, it will be close or identical to this text:

The task force left Vanejen with a cargo of pharmaceuticals for Regina.
It consisted of four ships: three scouts and a transport.
The transport Gyro Cadiz was a remade subsidised merchant, fitted with long range tanks.
Our ship, the Blatant Lie, was a bold protector now; our own mission side-lined.
Another, the Carlisle, was a sleek new ship with a freshly trained crew.
The last, Black Gold, was a ringer; a courier with a crew of malice and mould.
The route we took was circuitous, intended to avoid Zhodani patrols.
A few times, the group even jumped to deep space and then again to a world beyond.
I fell sick at Rhylanor and laid in bunk through weeks of suffering.
Whilst I shivered, fever-wracked, we were betrayed.
A call for help was heard but when we approached there was no downed merchant in need.
Two fanged raiders waited in devious ambush. They launched a salvo.
We were hit but these were no ship-killers. A crash was what they planned.
The Gyro Cadiz was forced to land and it landed badly.
We dove to aid the transport, calling for aid, but Black Gold and Carlisle were fighting one another.
They circled furiously, our comrades battling the enemy within.
We fought the wolves. And lost.
Down spun the gallant Blatant Lie, crashing as the raiders planned.
No more was seen of Black Gold and Carlisle.
We accepted death then but we were spared. A Navy ship, perhaps more, had heard our call.
They smote full upon the raiders with star-hot plasma and fire-tailed spearheads.
The battle ensued, for hours. One raider broke up, wreckage landing all around us.
The other fled, harried by the Navy.
They had not seen us, nor heard our desperate pleas.

We took stock, survivors from the Gyro Cadiz and Blatant Lie.
Surveying the results, the crews found that nothing would now fly,
Not Gyro, not Blatant Lie. Certainly not Black Gold nor Carlisle. Those were gone, or worse, might return.
Unsure of who to trust, we left our dying ships. We marched overland in no particular direction, seeking shelter or useable wreckage. Or a ray of hope.
One dawned.
Salvage of parts from the wrecks could make Blatant Lie fly again.
Parts from Gyro Cadiz, even from the wolf-ship.
But first they must survive. One of the scouts was a traitor. Which one?
Hiding was necessary. And air.
There was nothing in any direction, nothing but the mountain.
So, the mountain!
Glimpsed in twilight, a structure perhaps? High up on the slopes. Beyond our reach.
We walked anyway.

Well that we did, for there were wolves abroad.
Unknown to the survivors, some of the raiders had survived.
We found one, injured and dying. He told us of betrayal, of a scout ship crew replaced with mercenaries.
An inside job, a hijacking.
He died slowly. We did not kill him but we did little for him.
His body we left under the cold stars.
We walked on. We were shocked and confused, without a goal and knowing only death awaited us.

But the mountain!
We reached its base and found a way inside. Deep fissures in the rock, twisting and crawl-making.
We hoped for air somehow. Found water instead.
No way back now, airless death awaits behind. So we marched into the mountain.
Slopes and drops we navigated, breath coming short and stale.

A sudden cavern. A structure, silvery domes in the mountain darkness.
A place of forever, inaccessible yet calling to us.
We crossed a chasm that was not always there. Science and sacrifice provided thrust and the survival kit a rope.
It was enough.
On the far side, a hidden switch was perhaps triggered.
A bridge of light appeared.
We walked across. No need to puncture bottles of precious air.
Ahead a great vault door. Opening.
Welcome?
Death?
No matter. The wolves had come after us. The air was running out.
We fled inside and thought the door sealed behind us.
We cracked our helmets as soon as we could. Sweet air.
But we were trapped.
The wolves beat at the doors and somehow got inside.

We found a way deeper in and the door closed behind us. Safe for now, we explored.
Inside the mountain was a warren of rooms of silver and grey, each different, each with fantastic artifacts.
Leaning against the wall, a hidden switch was apparently tripped,
And suddenly, the floor glowed orange.
One person lost a finger-tip when he touched it.
Another hidden switch was tripped- and holographic visions of food appeared as mirages to
Tantalise the famished crew.
One gave into temptation and clawed his way into the vision.
Whereupon it materialised, as real meat, real fruit and real drink.
Other rooms held null-G sleeping berths, areas with mystic columns for no apparent purpose,
Or fabulous crystal eggs larger than six people.
In the farthest back room, a huge globe of the world stood and revolved in real-time.
It responded to their touch and (by looking close) they could see where they had crashed.
They stayed in the rooms, warm and away from the wolves and cold death of the surface, for days.
They found wondrous devices and played with them. Some were injured.
But they found a way to supercharge their suits. All the air they needed.
Items too, small and large. They made a stockpile.

But the wolves were no longer at the door. They were in.
The crew fled, grabbing what they could. The stockpile was forgotten, kicked aside.
But we took the things we most needed.
They fled, gunshots behind them and yells of dismay.
We did not look to see what was behind.
We almost forgot to close our helmets when the vault door opened.
Out we rushed, into the crushing darkness.
The magic bridge of light was gone and the vault door closed.
They began to make a plan but as they did the bridge clicked on.
To allow the survivors to just walk across the chasm.
As they did, the bridge turned red and turned off again just as the last stepped off it.
As they sighed relief, the vault door swung open and they left hurriedly.
One of the wolves was in pursuit but could not cross the chasm.
He turned, firing ineffectually.
Something dragged him back inside. We did not see what.

The mountain!
We walked away from it now, shuddering at what might have been.
There was no sign of returning traitors or any other threat.
We must leave quickly.
The heart of Blatant Lie, her reactor. Now crushed and broken and partially exploded.
They tore it out.
In its place went the things they had found.
They wired and fixed and hoped. The ship came alive.
Desperately heaving itself from the planetary surface, Blatant Lie struggled into orbit.
It lurched and stuttered through the system and finally prepared to make a single hop.
One jump, bearing the survivors to safety.
It was not to be.
A battle raged in the system and as the ships fought,
The Blatant Lie hid, hoping its side would win.
One torpedo from the fighting never hit a target and streamed on alone, until it caught
Blatant Lie in its sensors and moved closer, exploding to blank the scout's screens,
And disable its drives.
Without drives, the ship could not manoeuvre and no one heard its calls for help.
The belligerents left, first one side retreating, then the other pursuing.
Left alone, the scout and its heroic crew settled into the vacuous night and died.

THE REALITY BEHIND THE POEM

There is a great deal of falsehood in the poem but also some truths. There never was a convoy; three of the ships were fictional. Mercedes did this to conceal even the general area of Twilight's Peak. There were raiders but no navy patrol to battle them. This is not deception; Mercedes actually thought this was what had happened. She did not know the base's defences had fired on the Vargr ships.

Her ship's reactor was indeed crippled and the survivors did seek shelter in the mountain. They had no better options and one of the crew thought he saw a structure on the mountainside. In fact he did but there was no way to reach it from ground level. This was the high-level entry point, opening to launch a drone to investigate the intruders. Thus it was false hope that led Mercedes and her crew into the fissures, but that false hope was rewarded.

The account of what happened within the base is more truthful, although no better written. Mercedes and her crew crossed the artificial 'chasm' and entered the base, pursued by some of the raiders. They were eventually forced to flee, abandoning the stash of components they had assembled. They were able to take with them some antimatter batteries which provided enough power to get the scout ship back into space.

The scout ship was *Baleveny* but Mercedes refers to it as the *Blatant Lie* to prevent anyone backtracking the story. The poem ends, as has already been noted, with the destruction of the ship. This is a blatant lie.

AN INVITATION FROM THE CAPTAIN OF KNOWLEDGE

The message sent to the Travellers from Aish Niska is typical of his style – bombastic, self-congratulatory and also rather vague.

My Dear Fellow Hunters,

It is regret that I must inform you of the death of our dear friend B along with her crew. The circumstances are unfortunate and tragic, and also of great significance to our mutual interest. It may be that you already know of what has happened and that you found our friend before her demise. If not, then it may interest you to learn that B died on the world of Callia, during some kind of 'inexplicable incident'. I think we all know what that means.

Now that B is no longer with us I am able to reveal certain information entrusted to me. I alone was party to her full records and insights, and I am now able to share them. Indeed, up to this time I was unable to even acknowledge their existence. I am certain you will find this information entirely fascinating and that you will want to be among the first to hear it.

To that end I have arranged a conference of the finest minds in our field. Few, if any, others could have organised such an array of brilliance and insight in the same room, and the like of this event may never be seen again. The final arrangements are still being made but in the interim seek out Willem Rafem at Weiss Downport. He will provide the details for the meeting. I am sure you cannot wait to hear what I will reveal but I am afraid you must.

Your friend and fellow Hunter, your Captain of Knowledge,

Aish Niska

FINAL NOTES

Mysteries of the Ancients is the first of a multi-part mega-campaign. It lays the groundwork for what is to come next. In *Secrets of the Ancients,* the Travellers will learn more about Vlen Backett and who he works for. They will discover who the Ancients really were and what happened to them – and that some of them are still alive!

Omicron Division will play no part in *Secrets of the Ancients*, as they are distracted by events elsewhere. Unknown to the Travellers, the incident at Twilight's Peak is one of two events that will trigger a potential catastrophe that could resound across Charted Space and beyond. Omicron Division is scrambling to find out what has happened and what it means whilst the Travellers play out *Secrets of the Ancients* and will return to the stage in *Wrath of the Ancients*.

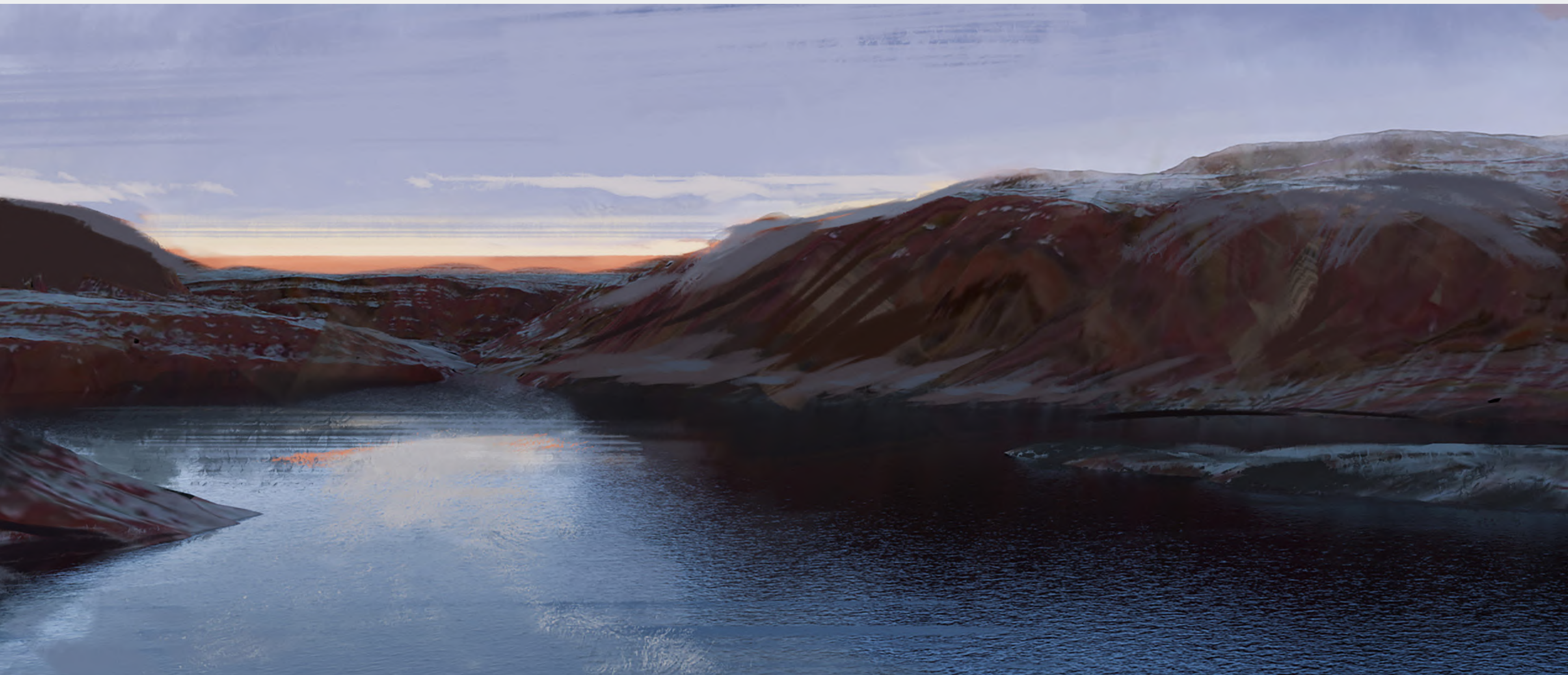
The other event is triggered by the Travellers in *Secrets of the Ancients*. They will, by that point, be players in the great game that unfolds around them. Minor players at first perhaps but pawns no longer. What is begun at Twilight's Peak could change the nature of Charted Space and the Travellers will be centre stage. In *Wrath of the Ancients*, the Travellers will meet Mercedes Karamaka again. They will witness the desperate stand by Omicron Division against an overwhelming threat… and see the Division's warships swept aside like so many twigs.

Equipped with their new-found abilities the Travellers must stand against the tide of destruction, turning aside the wrath of the Ancients. They will uncover the true legacy of Twilight's Peak and discover the fate of Captain Maddox. They will change the destiny of Humaniti or perish among the wreckage of the Third Imperium.

LEADING TO *SECRETS OF THE ANCIENTS*

At the beginning of *Secrets of the Ancients*, one of the Travellers will inherit items from none other than Vlen Backett. Their interaction with him during this campaign is the reason for the association, which is necessary to the plot of *Secrets of the Ancients.* After that point, the campaign will unfold as it would have if there were some other association such as a family link.

The uplift process begun on the Travellers needs time to develop along with certain triggers. They will go into the *Secrets of the Ancients* campaign with slightly better abilities than a typical band of Travellers but it is not until *Wrath of the Ancients* begins that they will come into their power. If a Traveller is killed along the way or someone new joins the group, one option is to use one or more of the people stored in the Twilight's Peak base. That Traveller will then experience the uplift process just the same as the existing ones.



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